

**PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND RACIAL SOCIALIZATION AS  
PROTECTIVE FACTORS FOR ASPIRATIONS AND ACHIEVEMENT AMONG LOW-  
INCOME, BLACK ADOLESCENTS**

by

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B.S., University of Maryland, College Park, 2003

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
School of Education in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

University of Pittsburgh

2009

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

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This study explored the nature of parental involvement and racial socialization as potential protective factors for aspiration construction and achievement among low-income, Black adolescents. Qualitative data were used to assess the relationship between parental involvement, racial socialization, specificity of aspirations, and level of achievement. Additionally, racial identity was considered qualitatively and quantitatively as a potential mechanism through which racial socialization relates to adolescent aspirations and achievement. Participants were 26 student-parent dyads recruited from a low-income, urban fringe high school. All participants took part in semi-structured one-on-one interviews, and adolescents also completed *The Multi-ethnic Identity Measure*. Findings indicate that some differences exist in types of parental behavior, racial socialization, and aspects of racial identity between high and low achieving students. A relationship between adolescents' ability to construct aspirations and achievement was also evident. Implications of findings are discussed, in terms of how best to support aspirations and achievement of high-risk adolescents.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Completion of this project involved the feedback and support of numerous people, for which I am immensely grateful. I sincerely appreciate the useful suggestions from each of my committee members: Dr. Joan Vondra, Dr. Ralph Bangs, and Dr. Amanda Hirsch at key points in my dissertation project to help me fine-tune my thought process and ultimately create a better end product. I am particularly grateful to my dissertation chair, Dr. Jane Pizzolato, for being an invaluable consultant throughout the entire process, from study conception to the final defense. I would also like to thank my colleague Prema Chaudhari for her contribution as a data coder for reliability. Additionally, I am indebted to the administrators at Clairton High School for their role in the study approval process, providing access to data, and being understanding of students engaging in study activities during the school day. Finally, I would like to thank the students and parents of Clairton High School for devoting their time as study participants and being willing to share their lives with me. The story I seek to convey throughout the following pages could not have been possible without their participation.

## **PREFACE**

This study uses the term ‘Black’ as a racial identifier instead of ‘African American’. This decision regarding semantics was made because participants used the terms interchangeably, but tended to use ‘Black’ as a self identifier more often. Thus, this wording was included in interviews to mirror participants’ word choice and hopefully minimize some of the boundaries that may exist when discussing race-related issues with someone of another racial background (the interviewer).

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Despite the fact that equal access to education is a promoted value in American society, the persistent achievement gap between those with more and less economic and racial privilege is an inescapable reality (Lee, 2002; Thompson & O'Quinn, 2001). Those growing up in low-income environments are more likely to attend schools where both access to and use of resources is limited (Borman & Overman, 2004; NCES, 2007). Specifically, schools in low-income environments lack resources; but simply gathering conventional resources (e.g., funds for after-school programs, updated textbooks) does not negate the fact that these schools still tend to have less experienced teachers, higher teacher turnover, lower school-wide academic norms (e.g., grade inflation), and weaker connections between the school and families (Brophy & Good, 1986; Cohen, Raudenbush, & Ball, 2003; Ferguson, 1991). Thus, students from impoverished environments are more often completing high school with a lower quality education compared to their more privileged peers (Halle, Kurtz-Costes, & Mahoney, 1997). A sub-par high school education can lead to restricted access to college, limiting the range of professions and opportunities for advancement available to these students. Unfortunately, this state of affairs maintains the status quo in terms of eventual educational success in our society, making the achievement gap one of the most pressing problems in American education today (Harris & Herrington, 2006; Lee, 2002).

Background characteristics, including race and socioeconomic status, have been found to be predictors of an individual's risk of poor academic outcomes (Lee & Burkam, 2003). The effects of the achievement gap have tended to most negatively impact low-income and minority students, in terms of eventual occupational success (Coleman, Campbell, Hobsen, McPartland, Mood, Weinfeld, et al., 1966; Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Lee, 2002). In efforts to explain this achievement gap, researchers have identified specific risks that make one less likely to succeed as well as protective factors that can promote success in developmental contexts that are less than ideal. However, these two lines of work, the achievement gap and the interaction between risk and protective factors, are often parallel in the research; a cohesive understanding of how these concepts fit together is lacking. Specifically, researchers have a clearer idea today of which factors contribute to resiliency in students at risk for poor developmental outcomes. But an understanding of how these factors are related, or which may be particularly essential for improving the specific outcome of achievement, remains unclear. This is problematic because the goal of reducing the achievement gap cannot be effectively achieved unless there is awareness of which protective factors matter most. Although the significance of protective factors may differ depending on the subgroup studied, knowing which protective factors are most important for those who are considered high risk can contribute to more efficient interventions against the achievement gap. The next section discusses specific protective factors that may be beneficial for high risk individuals.

## **1.1 PROTECTIVE FACTORS: CONTRIBUTING TO RESILIENCY IN HIGH-RISK ADOLESCENTS**

The term ‘resiliency’ defines those who are able to adapt positively in the face of adversity (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). Resilient individuals often have specific characteristics, or protective factors, that can mitigate risks experienced when being part of a minority group or growing up in a low-income environment. Examples include believing in one’s own efficacy, or having a supportive adult to provide consistent guidance (Luthar et al., 2000; O’Dougherty-Wright & Masten, 1997). The connection between risk and protective factors in an individual’s life and later adjustment is an interaction; protective factors carry more weight as environmental disadvantages (risks) increase (Rutter, 1990). However, protective factors are also less likely to be present in one’s life when one is exposed to multiple risks. When considering the potential risks associated with growing up in a low-income community, protective factors that have been identified in the research seem less likely to be present in these circumstances.

For example, protective factors include family cohesion and warmth (O’Dougherty-Wright & Masten, 1997), effective parenting, parental involvement in education and promotion of education-related goals (Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Woolley & Grogan-Kaylor, 2006), positive role models and a supportive social network (Smokowski, Reynolds, & Bezruckzko, 2000). These characteristics may be less frequent when one has a single parent, or is living in an unstable home environment, and/or is growing up in a dangerous neighborhood (Christie & Toomey, 1990; O’Dougherty-Wright & Masten, 1997). In fact, poverty decreases the likelihood of any such protective factors.

Specifically, poverty can operate as an overarching risk factor since low-income families often have a single source of income, due to being disproportionately headed by single parents

(O'Dougherty-Wright & Masten, 1997). This can lead to a depletion of psychological resources for many of these parents due to stress, making it more difficult to provide optimal levels of protection for their children in a risky environment (Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski, & Apostoleris, 1997). Thus, given the evidence that protective factors are important for cultivating resiliency in high-risk individuals, yet less likely to be present in these individuals' lives, discovering ways to nurture protective factors for high-risk students is an important task for researchers as well as teachers and practitioners.

Although the relationship between low socioeconomic status and high risk for negative developmental outcomes has been established in the research regardless of race, being Black and low-income can make an individual vulnerable to other risk factors associated with being from a historically oppressed minority group. Though the Black middle class is a growing demographic, poor urban areas still tend to be densely populated by Black families (Conger et al., 2002), making the risks associated with growing up in a low-income community common obstacles for many Black adolescents' chances at educational success. However, the academic achievement gap exists between White and Black students at the middle class level as well (Cokley, 2003; Ferguson, 2001, 2003), suggesting that some risk factors related to race specifically are operating to maintain the difference in achievement.

Several of these factors may be related to being a minority in a majority-run society. Although race is a social construction, and one's role in society is not as potently proscribed by racial identification as it once was, race is still "so deeply confounded with racism that it bears enormous power in lives and communities" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 112). Specifically, even if individuals do not acknowledge race as a significant part of their lives that they are

consciously aware of on a regular basis, one's lived experiences are still 'racialized', in that race is an inevitable component of the lens through which one perceives the environment.

In order to attain success, Black students (and parents) must follow the norms and practices (e.g., attending school functions, developing relationships with school personnel) of dominant society to some degree once the formal schooling system is entered. Potential barriers exist at the school level in the form of preconceived teacher expectations of Black students' capabilities (Tettegah, 1996) and guidance counselors acting as 'gate-keepers' and limiting access to higher level academic classes (Ogbu, 2003). The connection between home and school to fully support a child's education seems to be more difficult to forge as well for these high-risk students. Less frequent teacher-parent collaboration and lower quality teacher-parent relationships due to distrust and mutual pre-conceived expectations (Thompson, 2003) are more likely for low-income Black students.

Although desegregation of schools in the United States occurred more than 40 years ago, these subtle obstacles that Black students may face within the school system indicate that institutionalized racism is still present today. Unlike individual racism, which may be immediately apparent when experienced, institutionalized racism takes on more diffuse forms (e.g., tracking, low teacher expectations) that still significantly and negatively influence student achievement (Thompson, 2003). However, as researchers move towards understanding how aspects of institutionalized racism are manifested in our schooling system, protective factors specific to race that may counteract these potential risks are also being uncovered.

The family protective factors previously discussed are beneficial for adolescents broadly classified as high-risk, regardless of race. However, there are indications that protective factors may operate differently for adolescents from different racial backgrounds, perhaps due to the



differing set of circumstances (and arguably, potential greater disadvantage) one might face identifying as part of a historically oppressed minority group as well (Hill et al., 2004). Nevertheless, just as racial identification has the potential to add additional risks, race-specific protective factors may be a counterbalancing mechanism against risks for Black adolescents.

### **1.1.1 Racial socialization & racial identity as protective for Black adolescents**

Because of the widespread influence of institutionalized racism on the educational outcomes of Black students, it has been argued that awareness of racism as an obstacle to success can be a healthy coping mechanism for constructing aspirations and formulating a plan for achievement (O'Connor, 1997; Oyserman, Gant, & Ager, 1995; Oyserman, Kemmelmeier, Fryberg, Brosh, & Hart-Johnson, 2003; Sanders, 1997). This idea stems from identity development theories that suggest Black character development is contingent upon personal experiences in a mainstream (sometimes hostile) society (Clark, 1991). Navigating a path through mainstream and Black cultures requires competence in combating stressors while adapting to both environments in a way that is most beneficial for the individual (Miller & MacIntosh, 1999).

Since parents are an important source of knowledge about preparation for life as an adult (Miller & MacIntosh, 1999, Steinberg, 2001), parental socialization messages regarding race can be a primary contributor to the centrality of racial awareness as a part of an adolescent's identity (Gecas, 1981; Peters, 1985; Stevenson, 1995). Socialization occurs in the context of the family nested within the community, with an individual being more exposed to socializing agents outside of the family as he or she develops. However, the family is the first source of socialization an individual experiences; despite increasing autonomy as an individual develops,

family socialization messages continue to have effects throughout one's adolescence (Hill, 2001, Steinberg, 2001).

Racial socialization, a subset of socialization messages that occur more frequently in families of color (Bowman & Howard, 1985, Constantine & Blackmon, 2002), refers to the extent to which a child is (deliberately or not) exposed to behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes regarding one's racial niche in society (Hughes & Johnson, 2001; Marshall, 1995). Specifically, racial socialization can be defined as "the messages and actions that provide information on personal and group identity, interracial relationships, and social position related to race" (Thornton, Chatters, Taylor, & Allen, 1990, p. 176), with the goal of education in preparation for being a healthy and functioning member of society (Hughes & Chen, 1997; Peters, 1981).

These race-related messages can foster an advanced understanding of race as an adolescent, which has been linked with increased motivation and achievement in school (Constantine & Blackmon, 2002; Miller, 1999; O'Connor, 1997). Racial awareness (e.g., how racial identification figures in one's interactions) can be characterized as an aspect of racial identity, a concept that has been operationalized in a number of ways. Definitions of racial identity often include one or more of the following characteristics: a psychological sense of belongingness to a racial group, physical identification with a racial group, historical and cultural knowledge of one's racial group or roots, and a commitment to addressing social issues relevant for one's racial group (Demo & Hughes, 1990; Parham, 1989; Thompson, 1994; 2001).

These aspects of racial identity development are related to but separate from an adolescent's overall identity development, a major task of adolescence. However, it follows that the increasing levels of self-awareness that occur with identity development may be a precursor to a healthy sense of racial identity (Constantine & Blackmon, 2002; O'Connor, 1997).

Although knowledge of race-related constraints could lead to pessimism regarding one's likelihood of success, research suggests that the opposite can be true (Miller & MacIntosh, 1999; O'Connor, 1997; Oyserman, et al., 2003). Perhaps depending on how well one's overall sense of identity is developed, knowledge of society's low expectations may serve to stunt an adolescent's academic motivation and achievement, or spur an adolescent to perform beyond what is expected of him or her. Positive outcomes have been linked with identity development, suggesting that an individual who has obtained some degree of self-awareness may experience knowledge of race-related obstacles as a motivator rather than a detriment to success.

Specifically, successful identity construction has been linked to higher levels of academic achievement and eventual occupational success (O'Connor, 1997; Smokowski et al., 2000). A healthy racial identification has also been linked with indicators of positive adjustment including security in one's sense of self, a belief in one's life purpose, and enhanced achievement goals and performance (Constantine & Blackmon, 2002; Thompson, 2001). Thus, it seems that racial socialization messages an adolescent receives, filtered through the adolescent's developing sense of racial identity, operate as protective factors for developmental outcomes.

A great deal of research on what racial identification may mean for developmental outcomes has been conducted since the 1960's when racially-driven sociopolitical consciousness was a popular trend (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Cross, 1978; Thornton et al., 1990). However, previous research on racial socialization has often depended on quantitative measures that assess identification with the proposed parameters of each concept (Constantine & Blackmon, 2002; Hughes & Johnson, 2001). Although these aspects of racial socialization may be relevant for many Blacks, conceptualization of racial socialization may look different when individuals are asked to construct meaning for themselves. Although there has been some qualitative research in

this area (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008), research examining the role of participant-constructed racial socialization in comparison to other (non race-related) protective factors has not been significant. Thus, racial socialization and identity research would benefit from a participant-informed model based on current understandings of these concepts.

## **1.2 SUMMARY OF THE PROBLEM**

Research has established links between racial socialization, racial identity, and academic achievement, but less is known about which specific aspects of racial socialization and racial identity are most closely associated with resilience (Miller, 1999). In other words, there is no clear consensus on whether race-related socialization is an essential addition to other positive forms of parent-adolescent interactions (e.g., involvement, academic socialization) for low-income Black adolescents in terms of developmental outcomes. Spencer and Markstrom-Adams (1990) argue that race-specific socialization is an essential task for teachers and parents of Black children, however other research indicates that parental academic involvement alone plays a significant positive role in Black adolescent achievement (Hill et al., 2004, Jeynes, 2007; Woolley & Bowen, 2007). Are more egalitarian protective factors such as parental involvement and support for academics, that are protective for high-risk students regardless of race, the overarching answer to what is most important for resiliency in low-income Black adolescents? Or do racial socialization messages play a pivotal role in influencing achievement through adolescent racial identity? And if so, what messages seem most effective? These questions are important to consider when thinking about addressing the achievement gap. Answers to these

questions can provide insight on what types of supportive behaviors should be encouraged in parents, and what could make interventions more effective.

### **1.3 DISSERTATION PURPOSE**

Based on the gaps in the research, the goal of this study is to understand the role of parental messages about race for Black adolescents' aspirations and achievement when compared to other parental protective factors such as involvement and more general socialization messages about being an adolescent in a risky environment. The methods for this study are primarily qualitative from a postpositivist stance in order to provide more of a voice to participants regarding the variables of interest without disregarding existing literature.

The questions framing this inquiry include: (a) How are parental racial socialization messages related to student aspirations and achievement, in comparison to parental involvement and other socialization messages parents may be giving? (b) Are racial socialization messages important in constructing racial identity? If so, does racial identity serve as a mechanism through which racial socialization, aspirations, and achievement are linked?

A primarily qualitative study with additional quantitative measures was undertaken with a sample of 26 low-income, Black high school student – caregiver dyads to investigate these research questions. Characteristics of parental involvement, racial socialization, and student aspirations were derived from qualitative interviews with both students and parents in order to encourage participant meaning making. Both qualitative and quantitative data were used to operationalize racial identity, and achievement was assessed quantitatively. Qualitative data was collected on parental involvement and racial socialization in order to avoid socially desirable

responding. If participants are asked to recall behaviors in an open-ended manner, the answers may be more likely to reflect true experience than completing a measure that highlights pre-conceived notions about what these constructs *should* mean. Since racial identity may not yet be a concept that adolescents can richly describe, a quantitative measure was used to bolster adolescent interview data to gain a deeper understanding of each participant's racial identity development.

Findings suggest that parental involvement and general socialization are more common than race-related messages, however a strong association between the former variables and student aspirations and achievement was not found. Some aspects of both parental involvement and racial socialization occurred differently across high and low achieving student groups, suggesting a relation between types of parental behavior and achievement, even if frequency of these behaviors did not seem as protective. Specificity of aspirations and achievement were linked, as were racial socialization and adolescents' race-related beliefs. Some aspects of racial identity differed among high and low achieving students, but a strong association between racial identity, aspirations, and achievement was also not evident.

#### **1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY**

This study is important because it begins to look at how general parental protective factors and race-related protective factors (that have thus far been dealt with separately in research literature) may contribute to resilience in high-risk students. Although clear cut evidence for parental involvement and racial socialization serving as protective factors for high risk student achievement was not found, links between these two factors as well as the positive association

between student aspirations and achievement suggest clustering of parental protective behaviors, as well as perhaps an indirect link between parental support, aspirations, and achievement. Specifically, students with clear cut aspirations and parents who were aware of and in support of these goals tended to be high achieving. Thus, an open and communicative parent-adolescent relationship (as a precursor to awareness and support of student goals), may serve broadly as a protective factor; of which parental involvement is a part.

Future research should consider incorporating multiple measures of variables of interest, a larger sample size in order to include useful quantitative data, as well as data collection over time in order to better understand how the association between protective factors and outcomes evolves. A greater understanding of the interactions between Black parents and adolescents in low-income families that promote academic success may be helpful for tailoring supportive programs for these families, programs that seek to involve parents in more effective ways based on how marginalized parents view their involvement in their children's academics. Adding to the research on important precursors to Black adolescent success in school is imperative for a better understanding of how professionals in education can contribute more efficiently to lessening the academic achievement gap.

## **2.0 PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND RACIAL SOCIALIZATION AS PROTECTIVE FACTORS FOR HIGH RISK ADOLESCENTS**

This chapter will cover external circumstances that are prevalent obstacles in low-income, urban environments to provide a better understanding of the factors that play into the achievement gap. Then, the focus will shift to the protective factors that can lessen the challenging effects of growing up in a risky environment. The protective factors discussed are centered on the role of the parent. Parental behavior, including involvement and socialization, will be discussed as an influence on achievement, with particular attention to the role of race-related socialization. Literature on parental involvement and socialization as important for adolescent achievement will be covered as a background to the proposed research questions.

### **2.1 FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO MAINTENANCE OF THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP**

Circumstances such as inadequate educational opportunities, violent neighborhoods, poverty, and an unstable family often co-occur, making it significantly more difficult for adolescents growing up in urban, low-income environments to overcome obstacles and achieve educational and occupational success (Conger, Reuter, & Conger, 2000; McLoyd, 1998). The schools attended by students in low-income communities often experience high rates of teenage pregnancies,



dropouts, and delinquency, schools where Black students are often concentrated (Feagin, 2000; Miller, 1999; NCES, n.d.; Oyserman et al., 1995). High poverty urban schools are often underfunded, employ teachers with lower qualifications, and expect less of their students (“Acting White” 1997; Tatum, 2007). Students who repeat grades are at higher risk for dropping out of school (Epps, 1995), and Black students are over-represented in both of these categories (Halle et al., 1997; Ogbu, 2003).

Thus, students coming from low-income backgrounds and a disproportionate number of Black students are often dealing with the more immediate issues of day to day survival - from avoiding violence to making ends meet - that can interfere with school achievement (“Acting White” 1997; O’Connor, 1997; Portes, 2005; Smokowski et al., 2000). These students also face less than optimal school environments that can make achieving one’s academic potential a difficult task. How does exposure to these types of risks translate into achievement differences?

The percentage of Black students scoring as proficient on nation-wide academic assessments is lower than those of other races well before high school. Even the subgroup of high achieving Black students who take AP exams in high school are lagging behind their similarly achieving peers, with their mean AP scores ranking lower than any other race (NCES, n.d.). The SAT, traditionally one of the most important standardized tests for college admission, has also been identified as a significant barrier to Black high school students’ college aspirations. Black students perform more poorly on the SAT than every other major ethnic group in the US (“Confronting the Widening Gap” 2003; “Racial Scoring Gap” 2000). This trend persists even for Black students who come from backgrounds that appear to be more privileged. Black students are also more likely to have been suspended from school than any other racial group

(NCES, n.d.), implying that Black students are missing valuable days of instruction at greater rates.

Evidence shows that low-income students are less likely to complete high school and attend higher education compared to their more privileged peers (Halle et al., 2001). And since academic achievement differences often emerge between Black students and their peers in elementary school (Epps, 1995; Halle et al., 2001), leading up to differences in high school graduation rates (Harris & Herrington, 2006), admission to college (Epps, 1995), and even earning potential after college completion (NCES, n.d.); the academic achievement gap is a phenomenon with far-reaching consequences for low-income and Black students. Essentially, the education of Black high school students in low-income, urban schools is currently not adequate for future academic and occupational success (“Acting White”1997; Mincy, 2006).

Collectively, the research described suggests a combination of factors that influence the likelihood of academic achievement in Black adolescents. The numerous risks associated with attending a low quality school in a poor neighborhood can be challenging even for Black adolescents who do place a high value on school as the path to success, an idealistic belief that Black students tend to subscribe to, regardless of level of adversity faced (Mickelson, 1990; O’Connor, 1997; Smokowski et al., 2000). Thus, navigating the path to success through numerous obstacles is impossible without the presence of some protective factor(s). The factors contributing to achievement likelihood are unique for each individual, since different experiences shape each individual’s reality. The next section will discuss protective factors that may counteract the discussed risks.

## **2.2 PROTECTIVE FACTORS COUNTERACTING RISKS FACED BY LOW-INCOME, BLACK ADOLESCENTS**

It has been established that adolescents who have a high probability of facing numerous challenges in attaining success are often considered to be at high risk for dropping out of school (Connell, Spencer, & Aber, 1994; Masten, 2001); and that as adolescents develop, achievement in school becomes more relevant for future outcomes (e.g., attending college). However, those who are high risk face pressure in the form of others' expectations that can negatively affect perceptions of academic capabilities and achievement. Thus, regardless of what the underlying reasons may be, Black students are often expected to perform poorly when it comes to academics. These pre-conceived expectations of others compounded with exposure to inappropriate role models, peer pressure, violence, and a lack of parental support in high risk environments (Woolley & Grogan-Kaylor, 2006; Woolley & Bowen, 2007), can interfere with school achievement during this developmental period.

Faced with the potential of others doubting Black students' likelihood for educational achievement, the adolescent may need to rely on internal factors for attaining success; although unconditional support from someone who is not a doubter can add a significant boost to one's academic expectations and resolve. Parents may be the first source to consider as an important influence on high risk students' lives, since parents are known for their (sometimes unrealistic) optimism regarding their children's abilities and chances for success (O'Dougherty-Wright & Masten, 1997). Despite indications that supportive adults outside the family (e.g. teachers) and peer groups begin to emerge as more prominent influences on adolescent developmental outcomes (Ryan, 2000; Woolley & Bowen, 2000); family characteristics continue to play a role

in the aspirations and achievements of adolescents well into young adulthood (Hill et al., 2004; Marshall, 1995; Steinberg, 2001).

The next section discusses parental characteristics that are potentially protective for Black adolescent achievement. First, parental involvement and socialization regarding academics is discussed, followed by race-specific socialization. Both of these protective factors are recognized as influences on aspects of adolescent identity, which can in itself be a protective factor for achievement.

### **2.2.1 Parental involvement as a protective factor**

Positive role models who promote academic achievement have consistently been shown to be a protective factor for achievement among adolescents from low-income communities (McLoyd, 1998; Smokowski et al., 2000; Woolley & Bowen, 2007). However, such role models are often less available in low-income environments than in more privileged ones (O'Connor, 1997; Smokowski et al., 2000). For example, if the majority of adults in a particular community have not attended college, adolescents in that community who aspire to higher education are limited in who they can look up to as models, or consult on the process of transitioning into college. This reality of limited resources and support may be eventually manifested as doubt in one's likelihood of success.

When role models are lacking in an adolescent's environment, a positive parent-adolescent relationship can serve as an effective influence on adolescent school success. Aspects of the parent-adolescent relationship such as parental involvement in academics (Hill et al., 2004) and monitoring behavior (Laird et al., 2003) can influence an adolescent's level of engagement and achievement at school. Specifically, parental academic involvement has been

linked with higher aspirations and achievement, though the nature of the association may depend on class and race (Hill et al., 2004). And monitoring behavior, whether it is broadly translated as supportive guidance (Smokowski et al., 2000; Woolley & Bowen, 2007) or knowledge of adolescents' friends and whereabouts (Laird et al., 2003) is correlated with higher levels of school achievement and decreased antisocial behavior.

Low-income parents may be more likely to be involved in their children's lives in ways that are not always adequately captured in existing parental involvement measures, since these often focus on involvement in the school (Conger et al., 1994; Kohl, Lengua, & McMahon, 2000). Pre-conceived notions about minority parents may play a role in teachers' reports of parental involvement in the school as well (Hill et al., 2004). Traditional models of parental involvement have often been limited in this way: narrowly defining parental involvement as that which occurs in the school and depending largely on teacher report (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Epstein, 1996). Other conceptualizations of parental involvement have moved towards including parental supportive behaviors in a broader sense (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Kohl et al., 2000).

Specific ways in which a strong parental presence is linked with academic outcomes and aspiring to attend college include attending parent-teacher conferences, building relationships with school administrators, helping with homework, and discussing future aspirations (Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Griffith, 1996; Trusty, 1999). These forms of parental involvement in education are often characteristic of a warm and supportive parent-adolescent relationship (Woolley & Bowen, 2007), which is a protective factor in itself; particularly for high risk students (Smokowski et al., 2000). In addition, parents invested in their children's academic outcomes provide a form of socialization by valuing school achievement (Woolley & Bowen, 2007).

Woolley and Grogan- Kaylor (2006) found that home academic culture (e.g., helping with homework, showing interest in school activities) was linked with higher grades; and that supportive interactions within the family as well as having an integrated network of encouragement were linked with a student's sense of belongingness and confidence about his or her role in school (Woolley & Grogan- Kaylor, 2006).

It is evident that parental academic involvement is positively linked with adolescent achievement. However, conceptualizing this protective factor proved to be problematic, considering that traditional models were not adequately capturing the nature of parental involvement for high-risk adolescents, perhaps due to being manifested differently and thus harder to define for this population.

For example, being an active advocate for education as a parent has been found to be negatively associated with low socioeconomic status (Hill, 2001; Kohl et al., 2000; Lareau, 1996; 2003). Low-income parents are often unable to be physically present in their child's academic life due to long work hours, multiple jobs, and sharing meager resources among other children in the family (Conger et al., 1994). Beyond these barriers, low-income parents themselves may not have experienced their own parents taking an active role in their education. Without an adequate support system and a lack of models for how to be an involved parent, low-income parents may find it difficult to provide this kind of support for their own children (Jordan & Plank, 2000). Thus, the nuances of parental involvement in low-income families may not quite fit with traditional parental involvement models.

### **2.2.2 Constructing a comprehensive model of educational parental involvement**

Past models of parental involvement have often been narrowly conceptualized, such as parental attendance at PTA meetings and school events (Hill et al., 2004). However, as it became evident that parental involvement does not necessarily mean simply having a relationship with the school, a broader understanding of the concept became necessary in terms of who was reporting parent involvement and what counted as parent involvement (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Kohl et al., 2000).

A comprehensive model that utilizes input from both parents and teachers was devised by Kohl and her colleagues (2000) to better conceptualize the nature of educational parental involvement. This model includes contact with teachers, participation in school events, supporting education in the home, quality of the parent-teacher relationship, the teacher's perception of parental value of education, and parent's endorsement of the school.

Interestingly, differences in parental involvement emerged depending on the reporter. Teachers ranked Black parents and parents with less education as lower on parent involvement frequency and quality (Kohl et al., 2000). However, no differences based on race or education emerged when parents were the sole reporters. The implications of this finding on the significance of teacher perceptions of parental involvement is apparent when considering a study by Reynolds (1992) which found that teacher - reported parental involvement had the highest correlations with student achievement.

Thus, low-income parents may experience a lack of agency when it comes to supporting their children's education; they may be unable to have a consistently strong presence in the school despite their good intentions. Unfortunately, this lack of visible involvement may influence teacher perceptions of the parent and stifle the creation of a supportive collaboration

between the two. These findings suggest that low-income Black parents may be put in a difficult position when expectations may be low regarding their efficacy for academic support of their children. On the other hand, parental involvement can be particularly important for low-income Black adolescents in protecting against potential negative academic outcomes since these students are often achieving at lower levels than others (National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 1999; NCES, n.d.; Pettit, Bates, & Dodge, 1997). But, if teacher perceptions of parental involvement hold as much weight for student achievement as Reynolds (1992) suggests, student academic success could ultimately suffer. The next section highlights the nature of educational parental involvement for low-income, Black adolescents.

### **2.2.3 Race & class-based differences in educational parental involvement & expectations**

The unique contributions of SES and race to parental influences on adolescent aspirations and achievement were illustrated in a longitudinal study (Hill et al., 2004). Parents with lower educational attainment (and thus, likely to be of lower SES) who were involved in their adolescents' schooling played a positive role in adolescent aspiration construction. Involvement in this case was operationalized as responses from multiple reporters (teachers, parents, and adolescents) on parental presence in support at home and at school related to academics. Although there was a positive link between involvement and aspirations, actual achievement remained unaffected, making it unlikely that these aspirations could become a reality. On the other hand, parental involvement for Black adolescents *was* positively linked to achievement, suggesting the degree and nature of parental collaboration with adolescents may function differently for Black and White students (Hill et al., 2004).



This may be due in part to low-income Black parents continuing to hold high expectations for their children's success despite the numerous challenges related to poverty and institutionalized racism (Epps, 1995; Halle et al., 1997). The existence of racism in the form of lower teacher expectations for Black students (Delpit, 1995; Thompson, 2003), tracking practices (Oakes, 1999; Ogbu, 2003), and biased disciplinary practices (Ferguson, 2001; Murrell, 1999; Thompson, 2003) seems apparent when considering that Black parents and students often place utmost importance on the value of education for success (Hill et al., 2004), but the achievement gap is still present.

Thus, Black parents are faced with the difficult task of raising well-functioning, emotionally healthy, and academically successful children in a society where being Black translates to facing racism and discrimination throughout one's life (Peters, 1985). To fully understand the role of the parent for low-income Black student achievement, some considerations need to be taken into account before measuring parental involvement in the traditional way for this population.

Based on the research described, it seems that a wider range of parental behaviors should be included in the conceptualization of parental involvement for low-income Black families. Specifically, aspects of parental involvement in the home should be considered to be equally important as school involvement, since the latter domain has been the primary focus of traditional parental involvement models (Kohl et al., 2000). Research suggests that differences exist across domains of parental involvement by class and race (Kohl et al., 1994; Moles, 1993); thus it is essential that these differences are considered when constructing a working definition of what parental involvement entails. Additionally, depending primarily on the teacher as the reporter of parental involvement may lead to a limited view of involvement, since the teacher is

only privy to a subset of parental behaviors. Finally, race-related influences on how parental involvement is manifested should be considered as well. Black parents who are able to successfully socialize their children regarding race may be providing them with an important inoculation against future attacks to their well-being (Peters, 1985; Stevenson, 1995).

It seems that high expectations alone may not be enough for positively influencing student achievement, since the typically high expectations of Black parents and the achievement gap co-exist (Graham, 1994; Mickelson, 1990). But are high parental expectations combined with parental involvement in an adolescent's academics adequate for student achievement? The benefits of race-related socialization have been briefly touched upon; the next section will explore this concept in more depth as a potentially significant addition to general parental involvement and support.

### **2.3 RACIAL SOCIALIZATION AS A PROTECTIVE FACTOR**

The previous section considered the significant and positive influence parental involvement can have on high-risk students, particularly students of color (Hill et al., 2004; Reynolds & Gill, 1994). However, the research also suggests that teachers may view Black parents as less capable of appropriate parental involvement, which can have a detrimental effect on student engagement and achievement at school (Kohl et al., 2000). These indirect forms of institutionalized racism may act as a barrier to the involvement of Black parents in their children's schooling. In fact, a study by Thompson (2003) found district-wide racism to be the primary concern of Black parents in an underperforming urban school district.

Research discussed so far has focused primarily on parental involvement in the form of specific behaviors and interactions with the student and the school to promote engagement and achievement in school. Socialization, on the other hand, is a more diffuse process that begins before a child's entrance into the formal schooling system (Halle et al., 1997). Socialization refers to parental behavior, whether through modeling or direct interaction, that influences various aspects of a child's development (e.g., learned ways of interacting with others, self-beliefs) (Brody, Dorsey, Forehand, & Armistead, 2002).

A body of research suggests that socialization through the medium of family is a universal process for instilling values and societal norms in children for their future roles (Gecas, 1981; Hill, 2001; Hughes & Demo, 1989; Marshall, 1995; Sanders Thompson, 1994). In a society where being part of a historically oppressed minority group can still influence others' perceptions and the obstacles one might face, socialization regarding one's racial status may be important for competent functioning as well (Hughes & Johnson, 2001; Marshall, 1995; Sanders Thompson, 1994).

According to Sanders Thompson (1994), discussions with parents or other adults about race as a potential obstacle to self-development were common in 79 – 85% of a Black adult sample. Another study found that 73% of a Black adolescent sample agreed that they had been a part of family discussions on racism and prejudice (Biafora et al., 1993). The high rates of racial socialization in these study samples may also be a reflection of the age of respondents. For example, a study by Spencer (1983) focusing on preschool and elementary school age children found that 75% of parents cited that teaching children about race is *not* important. The perceived importance of racial socialization by Black parents may also be affected by shifts in our society's racial climate.

Current trends suggest that racial socialization, though not engaged in by all Black parents, is a potential protective factor for successful Black adolescent development in psychological as well as achievement domains. Although it is being suggested that a majority of Black parents are engaging their children in racial socialization, which is supposedly a protective factor for achievement, the achievement gap still remains. This implies that despite the existence of race-related protective mechanisms, external factors such as the institutionalized racism inherent in our education system continue to play a role in the academic outcomes of high-risk students of color. The ways in which racial socialization may buffer against negative external factors is described below.

A parental emphasis on historical aspects of racial membership as well as cultural pride has been empirically linked to greater self-esteem, more knowledge about aspects and traditions of one's group of origin, as well as more favorable attitudes regarding one's racial group membership (Constantine & Blackmon, 2002; Marshall, 1995; Stevenson, 1995). Even preparing children for the possibility of facing race-related barriers has been associated with positive outcomes such as higher grades, a greater degree of self-efficacy, and better psychological health, as long as the idea of race as a potential barrier is not overemphasized – this can erode confidence in one's ability to succeed (Biafora et al., 1993; Bowman & Howard, 1985; Marshall, 1995). Finally, an endorsement of mainstream culture (i.e., placing higher value on institutions dominated by Whites) by parents was linked with lower self-esteem regarding school achievement in Black adolescents (2002), suggesting that indirect negative messages about racial minority status can hinder positive identity development.

There is no one universally agreed-upon model of racial socialization, however a number of common race-related messages imparted from Black parents to their children have been

identified. Although some aspects of racial socialization may be shared by Black families, the frequency of racial socialization messages and the methods relied upon differ by family (Miller, 1999). These methods include deliberate discussions as well as more indirect (conscious or unconscious) messages through modeling, behavior reinforcement, or identification with others (Hughes & Johnson, 2001; Sanders Thompson, 1994; Stevenson, 1995).

For example, a parent's negative reaction to an adolescent having a relationship with an individual of another race can be a form of racial socialization, as well as deliberate discussions parents might have with adolescents regarding historical or current race relations. Adolescents may receive racial socialization messages by overhearing family members as well (2001), perhaps messages that contradict those that adolescents are intended to hear. Indeed, it seems that most Black parents value racial socialization and believe that engaging their children in such a manner is significant for positive development (Biafora et al., 1993; Hughes & Chen, 1997; Phinney & Chavira, 1995). But what messages are most favored?

Racial socialization messages have commonly been conceptualized as messages on racial heritage and pride, awareness of one's standing and potential struggle as a member of a minority group, promotion of racial self-development, and more mainstream messages such as the importance of education and hard work (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Boykin & Toms, 1985; Hughes & Chen, 1997; Marshall, 1995; Peters, 1985; Spencer, 1983; Thornton et al., 1990).

Past research has suggested that pride in one's group of origin or promotion of mistrust of other racial groups were less common racial socialization messages in comparison to preparation for race-related barriers and egalitarian messages given (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Hughes & Chen, 1997; Marshall, 1995). The latter seems geared toward the preparation of Black children for perseverance in a potentially unfriendly society while not adopting a mentality of blaming

racial barriers for shortcomings. It is argued that these invaluable ‘life lessons’ can prepare an individual for dealing with racial bias if such a situation were to arise.

One study found that the primary socialization method utilized by parents in the sample was to focus on high achievement (an example of an egalitarian message), however racial pride was the next commonly given socialization message (Thornton et al., 1990). Perhaps this is due to Black parents’ understanding the importance of nourishing ‘dual’ identities in their children: pride in being ‘other’ and knowledge of what that means, while simultaneously not wholeheartedly rejecting mainstream society since that is the context that must be lived in.

The centrality of racial socialization in the repertoire of messages Black parents give to their children can be better understood when considering what pre-existing factors may be necessary for racial socialization to occur. Deliberate racial socialization and the possibility of an individual being exposed to a racially charged situation and turning to a parent for information are more likely to occur in adolescence (Hughes & Chen, 1997; Marshall, 1995). Pre-adolescents may not yet be cognitively capable of taking in preparation for bias messages, and are usually not exploring their identities and the place of race in their self-concept in the way that adolescents and young adults do. Thus, racial socialization messages may be more likely to occur during adolescence, but will depend on both parent and adolescent characteristics (Hughes & Chen, 1997). For example, some parents may make it a point to discuss race-related issues, regardless of whether or not the adolescent initiates such conversation. Other parents may only focus on racial socialization as a result of questions from the adolescent.

The research described suggests that racial socialization messages may exert an influence on perceptions of achievement and actual achievement in Black adolescents. Arguably, racial socialization and parental involvement play a role in the adolescent’s emerging sense of identity,

the context in which achievement occurs (Marshall, 1994; Miller, 1999; Laird et al., 2003; Thompson, 1994). The next section considers racial identity as the mechanism through which racial socialization is positively linked with successful outcomes.

### **2.3.1 Considering the role of racial identity for adolescent achievement**

Having a positive racial identity could be one of the differentiating factors between high-risk Black adolescents who go on to succeed and those who do not. Though all Black adolescents in the US share the experience of being Black in a majority White society, the nature of this experience and how they identify with their race and culture varies widely.

Developing aspects of racial identity are influenced to some degree by the prevalence and type of racial socialization messages an individual receives during development. However, the relation between racial socialization and racial identity should not be seen as uni-directional. A common assumption may be that parental messages about race play a primary role in determining a child's racial identity, but children are not passive recipients of socialization messages. The racial socialization and developing racial identity association should be seen as transactional, with both parties contributing to the transfer and internalization of knowledge (Hughes & Johnson, 2001). For example, a parent may only choose to engage in explicit racial socialization if the child has a race-related experience and seeks an explanation from the parent. Then, the information dispensed by the parent may be incorporated into the child's emerging racial identity.

Based on the body of research covered, it is suggested that racial socialization is a fairly common process among Black parents of adolescents, and that particular aspects of the consequently developing racial identities of Black adolescents can be helpful for positive

developmental outcomes. Thus, the predominant stance in the literature today holds that a strong degree of identification with one's racial group can be beneficial to academic achievement (Constantine & Blackmon, 2002; Miller, 1999; O'Connor, 1997).

However, there is no clear consensus on the types of messages that may be most important for adolescent achievement, particularly in a high risk environment. The relative importance of these protective racial socialization messages when compared to general parental involvement and support in academics is also not well understood, providing a rationale for this particular inquiry.

In summary, potential parental protective factors that may be particularly important for high-risk Black adolescents have been identified in this review (i.e., parental involvement and racial socialization). The next section describes the current study, which is designed to understand how these two factors manifest themselves in students considered to be at risk for poor developmental outcomes.

## **2.4 THE CURRENT STUDY**

The goal of this exploratory study is to understand how parental involvement and socialization messages could influence aspirations and actual achievement in high-risk Black adolescents. Specifically, are race-related protective factors an essential addition to the general supports of parental involvement and socialization regarding academics? How important might race-related factors be in promoting resilience in terms of achievement for high risk Black adolescents?

This study is designed to connect research on race-related protective factors with research on more general parental protective factors. The goal of the obtained data is to understand how



these concepts fit together to promote resiliency. The questions framing this inquiry include: (a) How are parental racial socialization messages related to student aspirations and achievement, in comparison to parental involvement and other socialization messages parents may be giving? (b) Are racial socialization messages important in constructing racial identity? If so, does racial identity serve as the mechanism through which racial socialization, aspirations, and achievement are linked?

The findings will begin to elucidate which specific aspects of parental involvement, racial socialization, and racial identity play a role in student aspirations and achievement. For example, parent academic involvement and general protective and academic socialization messages (e.g., monitoring, instilling the value of education) may be prominent in discussions of adolescent aspiration construction and achievement. Additionally, supportive parental involvement and socialization may be likely to occur in conjunction with racial socialization. Racial socialization could be related to adolescent awareness of race-related barriers, and adolescents who have a greater degree of racial identity awareness may be more realistic and thoughtful in aspiration construction, as well as higher achieving. Thus, higher achieving students may also hold high aspirations, though the direction of this association cannot be determined. The goal is to understand how the combined expression of these factors informs the individual experiences of low-income Black adolescents on the brink of making major decisions about life after high school.

### **3.0 METHODS**

Because this study is exploratory, the foundation for analyses is primarily qualitative. However, some quantitative methods were incorporated in order to have a better informed (i.e., multiple measures) assessment of variables of interest, particularly racial identity and achievement.

Because a great deal of research has been conducted on improving achievement outcomes among high-risk Black adolescents, it is impossible to ignore previous findings and claim to be entering the field as an unbiased and unknowing observer. Thus, this study falls into the postpositivism camp. Specifically, methods for collecting data (i.e., interview protocol) were formulated based on previous work on resiliency for high-risk Black adolescents. In other words, the researcher sought to capture and describe a participant experience in a manner informed by past research; while giving a voice to participants and acknowledging potential conflict between the expected reality of the researcher and the experienced realities of participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Perhaps the research-informed reality of the investigator is not always an accurate portrayal of participants' perceptions. Thus the researcher took into consideration that data may not be easily categorized into a pre-conceived theory, particularly because of the nature of the sample; which will be described in further detail in the site description and recruitment subsections.

Qualitative data collection methods were deemed to be the best fit for study variables to avoid socially desirable responses by using solely quantitative measures. Participants may be

aware of how racial socialization and identity are defined by others through use of close-ended quantitative measures, which could influence how they answer. Additionally, qualitative measures can contribute to a more in-depth understanding of concepts such as racial socialization and racial identity for this particular sample, without assuming a pre-conceived theory for how associations between these variables and achievement may look (Constantine & Blackmon, 2002; Hughes & Johnson, 2001). The context-focused and emergent qualities of qualitative research make this data collection the best fit for the concepts in this particular study.

Specifically, a goal of qualitative research is to change the way research is conducted with marginalized populations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Denzin et al., 2008; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Traditional forms of research often restrict participant control of the study process, turning individuals into “passive objects of inquiry” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 4). Researchers have inherent power over study participants, but when marginalized or historically oppressed people are of interest, the researcher often holds other (e.g., economic, racial) privileges as well. This can influence the data that are obtained, as well as how data are interpreted. A goal of utilizing qualitative data collection methods from a postpositivist stance for this study was to acknowledge perceptions in the field on the nature of parental behaviors in high-risk families while not assuming that participants in this study would fit neatly into preconceived theories. Instead, a goal was to make the participant part of the knowledge construction process and reduce researcher privilege.

In order to determine the type and magnitude of the associations between qualitative data on socialization and identity and quantitative achievement and identity data, some quantitative analyses were necessary. Sample, data collection procedures, and data analysis techniques are outlined below.

### **3.1 PARTICIPANTS**

#### **3.1.1 Site description**

Recruitment activities took place at an urban fringe high school in Western Pennsylvania. Approximately 69% of community inhabitants were White, and 28% were Black (the remaining 3% were primarily biracial), according to Census statistics (United States Census Bureau, 2000). This site was deemed appropriate for sampling because of the potential risks facing adolescents there. The community is considered low-income, with a median family income of \$31,539, and a high number of single-parent households (38% of community inhabitants are married) (City Town Info, 2008). Ninety eight percent of students at the high school are eligible for free or reduced lunch (NCES, 2008).

Racial demographics of the high school were somewhat dissimilar from the community at large, due to a number of the mostly White community residents being senior citizens (and thus not having school-age children) as well as (primarily White) students transferring to other school districts because of the school's reputation for below average academic performance (NCES, 2008). The ratio of Black to White students at the high school was approximately 60 to 40. Thus, despite the community being urban fringe, student demographics were similar to public schools in the nearby mid-sized city. Specifically, 23% of students attending schools in the county were Black versus 59% of those attending schools within the city limits (Center on Race and Social Problems, 2007).

This urban fringe school, with a small Black student majority, was also on par if not worse than schools within the city limits in terms of Black students' performance. Black students attending city schools were achieving proficiency on statewide assessments in Math and Reading

at 33% and 20% respectively. At this particular school, rates of achievement were 15% and 26% for Math and Reading respectively (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2005). Interestingly, despite poor achievement rates at the school, attendance levels were high. Perhaps because the school was located in an urban fringe, resource-poor community adolescents found that there were no attractive activities to lure them away from regular school attendance.

### **3.1.2 Recruitment**

Recruitment took place during the spring and summer of 2007 during 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade English classes, as well as ‘Information Day’ during the summer when students came to register for classes and prepare for the upcoming school year. Recruitment occurred on Information Day as well so as not to limit the sample to only 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> graders. The study was described to students as research on students’ race-related ideas and opinions, as well as their goals after high school. The study was introduced in conjunction with another ongoing qualitative study on students’ self-regulatory behavior and ways of making meaning out of important experiences. Approximately 100 White and Black students received information on both studies. Approximately 70 of the students who were present at recruitment events were Black and therefore eligible for the present study. See Table 1 for a detailed description of participant yield based on recruitment activities. The final student sample, based on a response rate of about 31%, was 26 participants.

**Table 1. Participant yield from recruitment activities.**

	English classes				Information day			
	9 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>	11 <sup>th</sup>	12 <sup>th</sup>	9 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>	11 <sup>th</sup>	12 <sup>th</sup>
Approached		30	40					
Expressed interest <sup>1</sup>		20	32		2			3
Participated		2	20		2			2

*Note.* Recruitment numbers reflect only Black students. <sup>1</sup> Expressed interest in possibly participating.

### 3.1.3 Sample

Participants were 26 dyads of ninth through twelfth grade students and their caregivers. Student participants ranged in age from 14 to 17 years ( $M = 16$ ,  $SD = .66$ ). The majority of the students (77%) were in 11<sup>th</sup> grade. The remaining 23% were in 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, or 11<sup>th</sup> grade. The sample was disproportionately female (69%), though the school itself has fairly equal male and female student enrollment (NCES, 2008). All student participants self-identified as Black, however one student was biracial (Black/Asian). Student GPAs ranged from 1.67 to 3.80 ( $M = 2.60$ ,  $SD = .60$ ).

Although there were 26 student participants, there were only 24 caregivers in the sample because 2 sibling pairs (the same parent was interviewed for each sibling) were in the sample. The majority of caregivers who participated were mothers (72%). Other caregivers were three grandmothers as legal guardians, two father participants, one aunt as legal guardian, and one sister as legal guardian. One parent participant identified as biracial (Black/White).

## **3.2 DATA COLLECTION AND PROCEDURES**

Parental consent and student assent were obtained prior to data collection. Each participant (student and parent) received \$15 for participating. Both parent and student participants took part in one-on-one interviews and questionnaire completion.

### **3.2.1 Qualitative measures**

Parents and students were both interviewed in order to obtain information on socialization reports and experiences from both parties, as well as to understand how both parents and students made meanings of their relationship in the context of school. Interviews took place primarily in participant homes. The community public library was also an interview location, depending on parent preference. Students were interviewed during these parent visits if they were present at the time, however parent and student interviews took place separately (i.e., not within hearing of each other). If the student was unavailable to be interviewed at home, they were interviewed in the fall of 2007. These fall student interviews took place in the high school library during school hours for students. All interview sessions were audio recorded in their entirety. Participants chose their own pseudonyms.

Both student and parent interview protocols were semi-structured (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), with follow-up questions to gather more relevant information asked by the investigator at her discretion. The semi-structured interview format was chosen in order to ensure consistent discussion of the concepts of interest to the investigator in a ‘participant as expert’ manner (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Despite evidence in the literature that a link exists between racial socialization, racial identity, and achievement (Miller, 1999;

Oyserman et al., 1995), the investigator refrained from making this connection explicit to participants by asking open ended questions and encouraging participants to make their own meanings. For example, aspiring to attend college or frequency and nature of racial socialization messages were not deliberately discussed by the investigator unless the adolescents themselves acknowledged such aspirations, or that they had received race-related messages. In other words, whether or not racial socialization messages occurred was a question brought up by the investigator in order to encourage participants to think about these potential experiences, but if participants claimed to not have experienced or given racial socialization messages (depending on whether participant was student or parent) no further probing occurred in that area.

The goals of the student interview were to understand how adolescents were constructing their goals and thinking about achievement, as well as their interpretations of socialization messages from parents in terms of their own identities. The variables of interest were explored in the following categories of the student interview procedure: Academic Achievement and Aspirations (What do you want to be when you grow up?), Racial Identity (How important is race to you, in terms of who you are?), and Racial Socialization (Was/Is race a topic discussed with you at home?). See Appendix A for the student interview protocol.

Goals of the parent interview were to gain a sense of socialization from the parent perspective as well as to determine parental role in adolescent aspiration construction and achievement thus far. Parent interviews explored the following: Parental Aspirations (What are your expectations for your child?), Parental Support (What kinds of things have you been doing to support your child's education?), and Parental Messages about Race (What kinds of things regarding race have you discussed with your child?). See Appendix B for the parent interview protocol.



### 3.2.2 Quantitative measures

In addition to interview data, data were collected via survey. Caregivers reported demographic information including race, age, and sex of the adolescent as well as the caregiver's relationship to the adolescent. Students completed *The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure* (MEIM) as a quantitative measure of racial identity (included in Appendix C). Student achievement was also operationalized quantitatively as cumulative GPA. A cumulative measure was used in order to obtain as valid data as possible. Students were divided into high and low achievement groups based on GPA. High achieving students included those with cumulative GPAs above the mean, and students with GPAs below the mean were grouped as low achieving. Out of 26 participants, 11 had GPAs above the mean of 2.60, one was at the mean, and 14 were below the mean.

*The Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure* (Phinney, 1992) was selected for use with this sample due to the relatively simple language used and fewer items compared to other measures. Additionally, measures such as the commonly used *Racial Identity Attitude Scale* (RIAS) may not be as relevant for this sample since several of the items describe situations that respondents may be more likely to experience in college or work settings. In other words, the RIAS may be more appropriate for older participants who have had exposure to more activities and situations that could be affected by racial membership. *The Racial Identity Attitude Scale* (Helms & Parham, 1990) is appropriate for anyone with a 9<sup>th</sup> grade reading level, but many of the participants in this sample may not have achieved 9<sup>th</sup> grade reading proficiency. Thus, the MEIM was the quantitative measure of choice for assessing racial identity in this sample.

The MEIM is a 12-item measure with a 4-point Likert scale that ranges from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree.' The measure assesses active seeking of racial or ethnic identity as well as feelings of belongingness to one's racial or ethnic group. The MEIM differentiates

between one's objective ethnic identification based on parents' ethnic group and perceived self-identification with said group. The measure was also pilot tested and revised twice to obtain a more precise measurement of the construct under study. Reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) are typically above .80 in a variety of populations. In this particular sample, the Cronbach alpha coefficient was .78 for the total score.

MEIM total score was used as a measure of racial identity since an overall conceptualization of this variable was the focus of this research. Questions focus on participation in social activities with members of one's ethnic group and practicing cultural traditions, two aspects common across ethnic groups as ways of exhibiting group membership (Phinney, 1990). The two subscales and a sample item from each are as follows: Ethnic identity search: "I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs;" and Affirmation, belonging, and commitment: "I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means for me." The next section describes the qualitative data collection process, including researcher characteristics as an influencing factor, organization and processing of data, and operationalization of variables.

### **3.3 OPERATIONALIZATION OF QUALITATIVE VARIABLES**

Before reduction and synthesis of the phenomenological data on parent socialization and racial identity for participants, it is imperative that I discuss my position in relation to the data, since how I am perceived by participants is an unavoidable factor in shaping their answers to questions and what they are willing to share with me. Investigator self-reflection is also important for beginning to understand how one's own worldview can color data analysis.

I share the experience of being a person of color with participants, however my experiences are significantly different as an upper middle class South Asian American, limiting my understanding of identity and achievement-related struggles specific to being a Black adolescent from an urban fringe, low-income community. As previously mentioned, the vast majority of the community consists of Blacks and Whites. The initial reaction of some students (and perhaps parents, though they were less vocal about it) seemed to be confusion about my racial identification and curiosity about my interest in race-related issues. Some participants asked about my racial background and my school experiences, which could be due to comfort or suspicion. This heightened awareness on the part of participants could have influenced some to stick to more socially desirable responses and/or omit information.

### **3.3.1 Preliminary tasks: Transcription & reflection**

The primary sources of data were the in-depth interviews conducted with parents and students, with investigator reflections on each interview adding a secondary source of information. All interviews were transcribed in their entirety, by the investigator or a professional transcription service (20%). Each transcript was reviewed in conjunction with the audio file by the investigator to check for accuracy. The interview data were analyzed for emerging codes, categories, and overarching themes across participants.

As previously mentioned, the interviews were based in postpositivist grounded theory traditions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000); the data are considered inseparable from participant experiences. According to Glaser, as quoted by Denzin and Lincoln, “the purpose of grounded theory is to generate theory, not verify it” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 513). Thus, instead of attempting to categorize participants based on the preconceived theories mentioned earlier, the

emerging associations between parental socialization, identity, aspirations, and achievement based on input from this sample were used to formulate theory, which was then compared with existing theories. The investigator hoped to capture participant worldviews and conceptualizations of race and identity by asking open-ended questions that would encourage participant meaning-making.

After each interview was completed, the investigator engaged in reflective writing about her general impressions of the interview (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This was done to act as a platform for creating extended memos on emerging associations between the variables of interest, as well as to provide support for the chosen code labels and accompanying definitions. Additionally, the reflections helped retain some of the aspects of interviews that cannot be captured on a tape recorder, such as observed participant expressions, body language, or inflections that were particularly memorable.

Qualitative data were analyzed by creating separate code lists for each variable of interest. The coding process was done through constant comparative analyses: participant responses were compared with each other and grouped according to their differences and similarities (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Line by line coding was done to minimize the imposition of existing theories or investigator beliefs on data interpretations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). This process was used as a constant reminder that the investigator is separate from participant experiences and needs to retain a humble position when interpreting the emerging data. The constant comparative process occurred across multiple dimensions. Specifically, data within participant interviews were compared with each other, data across interviews were compared, data were compared with the emerging categories, and finally categories were

compared with each other (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The resulting mutually exclusive categories were labeled with descriptive tags or codes.

To establish inter-rater reliability of the investigator-created codes, 25% each of parent and student interviews were coded by the investigator and two other coders. Each coder was provided with a draft of a codebook containing all codes for each variable of interest, code definitions, and quoted examples. Disagreements between raters were channeled into creating more precise code definitions and ultimately a revised coding scheme for each variable, included in the appendixes. Cohen's kappa for reliability was applied to the coding schemes until the desirable agreement of .80 or above was reached for each. Specific percentages are included in the sections below, which discuss specifically how the coding process took place for each variable.

### **3.3.2 Coding racial socialization**

Parent interviews were the primary source of information on the nature of parental socialization, however student interview responses were also considered as a consistency check for what parents disclosed. Race-related messages were grouped in categories that were informed by the literature, but primarily defined by participants. A high degree of racial socialization was operationalized as both parent and adolescent agreeing that race-related messages had been given to the adolescent, or race-related discussions had taken place, more than occasionally. Racial socialization messages were divided based on particular themes (elaborated upon below) in order to determine if specific types of messages were more associated with adolescents thinking in-depth about achievement goals as well as actual achievement. A kappa coefficient of .88 was

achieved for distinguishing between the types of racial socialization that made up the themes below.

The categories of racial socialization that emerged were as follows: (a) No racial socialization – the adolescent had not yet been given any race-related messages according to both parent and adolescent; (b) Historical and cultural messages – instilling pride in one’s racial history and culture; (c) Cautionary messages - preparation for pre-conceived notions from others, not quickly trusting others; and (d) Egalitarian messages - power of the individual, minimizing the importance of race when judging others. See Appendix D for examples of each of these racial socialization themes.

Adolescents were asked if they recalled receiving race-related messages from caregivers and what the nature of these messages was. The same categories of racial socialization for parent interviews were used. The ‘no racial socialization’ category was only used if both parent and adolescent agreed that racial socialization had not occurred in the context of their relationship. This was done because parents were more likely than adolescents to speak at length about messages they had given as well as adolescent reactions to those messages.

### **3.3.3 Coding parental involvement and general socialization**

Socialization messages not related to race were explored in the Parental Support category of the parent interview with questions that asked explicitly about the types of support caregivers were providing for adolescents. Parents also tended to discuss general socialization and their beliefs about education spontaneously in the context of their expectations for their child. Student interview responses were also examined, particularly to gain a more reliable characterization of the parent-adolescent relationship. The categories of general socialization and involvement that

emerged were: (a) Indirect messages -parents living their own lives according to their values with the hopes that the adolescent would follow suit; (b) Explicit supportive behavior - engaging in behaviors that directly encourage adolescent academic achievement; (c) School involvement - parental participation in school activities and with personnel; and(d) Parent-adolescent relationship - transference of parental values to the adolescent based on the nature of the relationship. See Appendix E for the parent involvement and general socialization code list in its entirety, along with descriptive quotes. The kappa coefficient obtained for types of parental involvement and socialization making up the themes above was .96.

A pre-conceived theory of what constitutes high parental involvement was not created, since what may be considered “good” or appropriate involvement may look different for this sample than what one might expect based on previous research. Thus, emerging findings were used to inform a sample-specific definition of high parental involvement, which is discussed in more detail in the Results section.

### **3.3.4 Coding racial identity**

Adolescent interviews were the only source of data used for conceptualizing racial identity qualitatively. Much of what was disclosed by adolescents consisted of race-related beliefs, which were taken as an implication of racial identity. These qualitative data on racial identity were used to complement quantitative data obtained, which is explained in more detail in the data analysis section. Adolescent race-related beliefs as aspects of racial identity were: (a) Egalitarian beliefs – focusing more on other factors that could influence others’ perceptions or individual chances of success; (b) Awareness of race-related obstacles – acknowledgement of racism being prevalent in the past and/or present in a variety of contexts; and (c) Racial pride – feeling positive and

perhaps seeing oneself as powerful and influential based on racial identification. Kappa coefficients of .90 or above were obtained for the racial identity aspects that made up each of these larger categories (constructed after discussion and consensus between raters). See Appendix F for the complete list of adolescent race-related beliefs along with descriptive quotes.

### **3.3.5 Coding aspirations**

Students' aspirations were assessed qualitatively through open-ended interview questions. Students were first asked what they wanted to be when they grew up; follow-up questions were asked depending on the response. These follow-up questions included specific plans after graduation, college options being considered and factors going into these choices, factors influencing the student in aspiration choice, and the student's current assessment of whether the aspiration in question was feasible. Parent data on knowledge of adolescent aspirations, expectations, and support of these goals was included as well. Combined parent and adolescent responses served as the basis for grouping participants along a continuum of aspiration construction.

In order to reliably create the aspiration scheme described below, participant responses to the following categories were coded for inter-rater agreement: adolescent aspiration articulation (.80), adolescent aspiration commitment and engagement in self-regulatory behavior (.97), parental expectations (.85), and parental congruence with adolescent aspirations (.84).

The aspiration continuum that emerged was as follows. (a) Aspiration articulation and parental congruence: the adolescent articulates clear aspirations, is involved in and/or has a clear-cut plan for what he/she needs to do to achieve aspirations, has some idea of what career of choice entails. In addition, the parent must say more than 'being successful' for parental goals



for the adolescent. The caregiver must mention the same career path/field as the adolescent and be in support. (b) Aspiration articulation: adolescent characteristics are the same as the first category, but the parent only discusses adolescent success broadly without mention of a specific career path; OR the parent admits not knowing what adolescent strives for, OR the parent has different goals for adolescent and mentions different career options not mentioned by adolescent. (c) Parental aspiration articulation: the parent has more clearly determined goals for the adolescent (i.e., knowing what he or she needs to do to achieve success), but the adolescent is unsure, not motivated, and/or uninvolved. (d) Lack of clear aspirations: the student either has no clear career choice beyond going to college, has career choices but is not doing anything towards making self competitive and/or has no idea what he/she needs to do, and/or the student does not have a clear idea of what his or her chosen career path entails. Additionally, the parent does not mention anything beyond the adolescent being successful in general in whatever he or she chooses.

The emergent codes were used to frame the findings, in terms of what patterns seemed to be apparent regarding the relations among parental factors (racial socialization and involvement), racial identity, aspirations, and achievement. Patterns were discovered by exploring how codes linked to each other as well as diverged from each other. Specific analyses based on research questions are explained below.

### **3.4 DATA ANALYSIS**

Findings on the characteristics of parent-adolescent relationships that could play a part in the occurrence and frequency of involvement and socialization will be discussed first (i.e., parental

awareness of adolescent goals, parental values regarding education). This context is provided in order to give insight on the underlying components of the parent-adolescent relationship that could have a role in the likelihood of involvement and/or racial socialization occurring. Student interview data were incorporated as a consistency check. For example, if the adolescent did not perceive the parent as highly involved, this held more importance for participant classification, since parents were less likely to blatantly acknowledge a less than positive influence on their children's lives.

Next, the types of general parental involvement and socialization that were common across the sample as well as more isolated by student achievement (higher vs. lower achieving) will be discussed as a precursor to comparing these parent-adolescent interactions to race-related socialization as important for achievement (the basis for the first research question).

To answer the first research question, how are parental racial socialization messages related to student aspirations and achievement, in comparison to involvement and/or other socialization messages parents may be giving; the following analysis methods were employed. Parent qualitative data were reviewed for frequency and type of racial socialization messages, which were grouped according to the categories previously explained. The occurrence of racial socialization was compared with the incidence of general socialization and parental involvement to determine the association between these two variables, as well as their frequency relative to each other.

Specifically, construct tables were created to explore the types of general socialization and racial socialization that were emerging as common. Next, case-ordered effects matrices were created to determine how parental socialization factors were linked with student achievement. Matrix entries were split into higher and lower achievement groups by student GPA, then

occurrences of racial and general socialization among these two groups were compared (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The association between parental socialization and student aspirations was explored in a case-ordered effects matrix as well. Students were grouped according to the aspiration specificity classification scheme previously described. Then, specificity of student aspirations was compared with frequency of parental socialization by type (racial vs. other, as well as specific aspects of each). In other words, aspects of both general and race-related parental socialization were examined along with adolescent aspirations to determine which types of parental behavior were most common among adolescents with more clearly constructed aspirations.

To answer the second research question, are racial socialization messages important for Black adolescents in constructing racial identity, and does the latter serve as a mechanism through which racial socialization, aspirations, and achievement are linked; the most common racial socialization messages and the race-related beliefs most frequently discussed by adolescents were identified. To obtain a more comprehensive assessment of racial identity, a descriptive table was created of student *MEIM* scores and race-related beliefs. Then, the relation between frequency and type of parental racial socialization messages, qualitative racial identity data, and *MEIM* scores was examined. Finally, construct tables were created to assess the link between racial identity, aspirations, and achievement.

The themes that emerged from these qualitative data displays and quantitative analyses were used to frame the conclusions depicting the relations among parental factors believed by participants to influence achievement and aspirations for Black adolescents in this sample.

## **4.0 RESULTS**

Findings pertinent to the research questions will be discussed after a description of the nature of parent adolescent relationships in this sample, in order to gain insight into the context in which parental involvement and racial socialization behaviors are occurring.

An independent samples t-test indicated no significant differences in cumulative GPA based on student gender ( $t = -1.64$ ,  $p = .13$ ). However, due to the small sample size, a fairly large effect size was found ( $\eta^2 = .10$ ). A one-way between groups ANOVA found no significant differences in cumulative GPA based on grade ( $F(3, 22) = 2.28$ ,  $p = .11$ ). The calculated  $\eta^2$  of .24 indicates a large effect size. This may be a reflection of the disproportionate number of 11<sup>th</sup> graders and females in the sample.

### **4.1 THE NATURE OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND ADOLESCENT ACHIEVEMENT**

Based on interview data, only 4 out of 24 caregivers seemed to be not particularly involved in the lives of adolescents. Three of the adolescents with minimal parental involvement were achieving below the GPA mean. The sole adolescent achieving above the mean in this subgroup, as well as other adolescents who experienced a high degree of parental involvement but had conflicted relationships with parents and/or inconsistent support, cited other positive influences in their

academic lives such as peer or teacher support. Although the other 3 lower achieving students receiving minimal support from parents also cited other positive sources of support in their lives, these students also admitted the academic weaknesses that made school difficult for them, perhaps the factor that differentiated the 3 lower achieving students from the high achieving student with minimal parental involvement.

Low parental involvement was apparent if (a) the parent did not or could not disclose specific ways in which he or she supported the adolescent, which was confirmed by the adolescent; or (b) the parent described his or her relationship with the adolescent in a positive but vague manner, but the adolescent contradicted this positive spin. Caregivers had more optimistic views of their relationships (perhaps a tendency towards social desirability), but adolescents were more candid in acknowledging if their caregivers were not positive influences on their lives. This echoes a finding by Callan and Noller (1986) that parents have a higher stake in maximizing similarities and positive interactions between themselves and their adolescent children, whereas adolescents prefer to minimize similarities in order to assert independence.

Thus, low parental involvement was more evident when considering parent interview data in conjunction with adolescent interviews. Parent data were considered first when operationalizing the nature of parental involvement for each parent-adolescent relationship, since parents were more descriptive in their responses. However, if the adolescent contradicted parental opinions of their relationship, this held more weight, since adolescent perceptions can ultimately be more important for how effective socialization or involvement may be.

For example, parental pride in an adolescent's achievements, or wishing generally good things for the child could not mask a lack of awareness of what the adolescent aspired to, or the adolescent not acknowledging the parent as a confidante or major influence on goals. Consider

the following vastly different descriptions from a parent-adolescent dyad. “We’ve always been tight...he’s a wonderful child” (Brenda, mother). “My family isn’t very caring...my family is very enraging towards each other, towards me. They’re not really the people I’d go to [for support] because arguments and fights start like nothing in my household” (Neamkei, Brenda’s son, 11<sup>th</sup> grader).

Despite Brenda’s positive characterizations of her son, the investigator noted her tendency to dodge some probing questions by making a joke or answering in a vague manner before changing the subject, essentially glossing over potential serious issues. For example, an out of character incident (according to Brenda) where Neamkei physically assaulted his girlfriend at the school was spoken about nonchalantly. As evidenced by Neamkei’s response, a very different impression of Brenda and Neamkei’s relationship with her emerged during her son’s interview. Some of the less than optimal family interactions at home as well as Neamkei acting out at school may be related to mental health issues Neamkei was having, a fact that came to light some time after the interviews were conducted.

However, the majority of adolescents shared positive perceptions of their relationships with caregivers, often describing the parent or the relationship in glowing terms.

My mom is like, the best mom. She the best person. She been through the wire, like for real. She been through so much and she still here. She should get an award. And I ain’t even just sayin’ that ‘cause that’s my mom (Laquinta, 11<sup>th</sup> grader).

These generally positive relationships set the stage for parental involvement and socialization being common occurrences within the sample. Interestingly, some forms of parental involvement were common regardless of student achievement (operationalized as GPA), but some forms of involvement were more likely to occur for high-achieving students whereas others

in low-achieving students. Despite the high levels of parental involvement and generally positive parent-adolescent relationships in this sample, (perhaps study participation was a direct reflection of these characteristics) there was a range of student achievement. To reiterate, student GPAs varied from 1.67 – 3.80 ( $M = 2.60$ ,  $SD = .60$ ). Thus, although one may expect a high achieving adolescent sample if high levels of parental involvement are present, this was not the case for the sample. This suggests that high parental involvement, which characterized the majority of the sample, may not be enough for high achievement. However, the existence of specific types of involvement within the parent-adolescent relationship may be more clearly linked with achievement, since differences emerged in this regard.

The types of parental involvement that were common and also equally represented regardless of student achievement were parents instilling values about the importance of education ( $n = 8$ ), making parental academic expectations clear ( $n = 12$ ), emphasizing availability for supportive interactions ( $n = 8$ ), setting themselves as examples ( $n = 6$ ), and attending parent-teacher conferences at school ( $n = 8$ ).

Parents across the board of student achievement believed in supporting adolescents directly by instilling explicit values about how important education is for future goals, as well as being clear about what was expected of the adolescent in regard to academics. The following two examples illustrate these themes respectively. “During the school year I don’t ask them to get jobs ‘cause I want them to do their studies” (Marylou, mother). Marylou goes on to say that her sons are only allowed to have jobs during the summer months. Jobs during the school year may affect time available for studying and homework completion, which affect academic performance, and ultimately likelihood of achieving education-related aspirations. Thus, parental emphasis on academic success over a part-time job suggests a higher value being placed on

foregoing a small income at present for a potentially larger reward in the future, as a result of improved academic performance. Next, an example of parental expectations:

She is going to college. They're all going to college. My children they do understand, they know that I'm a firm believer in education. They do, they understand that. And I mean I won't settle for anything less. I believe we all have a moral obligation to be intelligent (Vanessa, mother).

The following quote is included from Vanessa's daughter, as evidence that parental messages about the importance of education were being received. "Every day to me, [education is] stressed. Like, I'm constantly being nagged about how important it is" (Becky, 11<sup>th</sup> grader). Despite the negative connotation implied with Becky's use of the word 'nag', it appears she internalizes her mother's values since she agrees that education is very important for success.

These types of messages are, theoretically, quite important for fostering positive attitudes in adolescents towards school and achievement. But perhaps, despite frequent occurrence of these messages, they are not as powerful as one would hope. This seems to be the case when considering that these messages were common for both high and low-achieving students.

Most parents also recognized the importance of emphasizing parental availability and reliability as support systems to adolescents.

[On what daughter may be thinking] He's gonna punish me because I did this wrong, but sometimes we make mistakes through life. And we don't need to be punished, we need to be informed at what's goin' on and how to go about it. So I really let them know that I appreciate it, them coming to me and just talk to me. And I won't punish you because you *came* to me on your own and *talked* to me and told me. And all I can do now is try to



help you goin' forward...they obviously don't come to me and talk to me about everything (Jim, father).

"I say Laquinta, don't be scared to talk to me. Come and talk to me you know, because communication is the best thing. If we can't communicate, we don't have nothin' you know" (Renay, mother).

Both of these parents were making attempts to deal with adolescent transgressions in positive ways that would not irreparably damage their respective relationships with their children. For example, Jim's daughter Erykah was still working through her negative feelings about her parents' divorce a few years ago, an event that led to a decreased income and splitting of the family across states. Erykah and one of her younger siblings moved with their father to his childhood community. It seemed that Erykah still resented Jim for some of these significant changes in her life, which led to her acting out at times. However, Jim was determined to remain a consistent positive support for Erykah, with the hopes that she would appreciate his investment in the future.

Renay was experiencing a great deal of anxiety about her daughter Laquinta quickly approaching womanhood due to the risks that come along with this in a low-income, urban community with few resources (i.e., unplanned pregnancy). Renay was upfront with Laquinta about her fears, explaining clearly that there were no funds to support an unexpected baby. Thus, it was Laquinta's responsibility to ensure such an event did not occur. Despite their close and communicative relationship, Laquinta's precociousness and Renay's temper often led to negative interactions, the most recent of which was Laquinta running away from home. Thus, both Jim and Renay were working on constructing positive relationships with their adolescent children by emphasizing mutual communication.

Communication as an aspect of parental support was seen as crucial particularly due to the challenges of growing up in an urban, low-income neighborhood. Specifically, parents wished to present themselves as unconditionally supportive of adolescents to promote trustworthiness in the context of the parent-adolescent relationship. For example, some parents strove to maintain non-judgmental attitudes about adolescent sexual activity. Instead, these parents promoted safe sex; with the hope that the adolescent would feel comfortable confiding in the parent if sexual activity were to commence.

A more indirect way of transmitting the value of education to adolescents that was common among parents was to make examples of themselves for the adolescent to follow. Those parents who made efforts to set examples for their children recognized that credibility with adolescents may be compromised if the value of education was touted but parents themselves did not live by this creed. “I’m in school myself... tryin’ to get a Bachelor’s degree.. ‘Cause I feel like I can’t just sit around and be a hobo. You know, set my children a good example with their lives” (Lynn, mother).

In fact, all parents agreed with the ideal belief that education is important and school achievement is necessary for future success. But, those parents whose own lives did not, apparently, reflect this abstract belief (e.g., not providing concrete guidance for academic achievement, being minimally involved) were less likely to be seen as significant positive influences or supports for adolescents. These particular parent-adolescent dyads often contradicted each other in how each party viewed the parent-adolescent relationship. Consider the following set of responses from a parent and her two daughters regarding their relationships with each other. “Oh, I give her all the support in the world. I mean, that’s with everything.

Everything” (Ashleigh, mother). “Me and my family are not really close” (Poetic C, Ashleigh’s daughter, 11<sup>th</sup> grader).

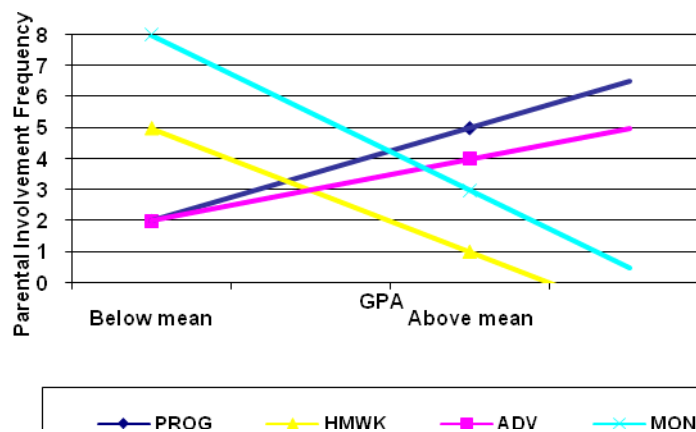
<Discussing obstacles to achievement> Not having help from anybody to [achieve goal of college]. So basically, doing everything, all the research and all the applications and everything on my own. I think that’s one of the reasons why I haven’t really like, filled out any applications in my senior year. It’s basically all on me, that’s how I feel (Brianna, Ashleigh’s daughter, 12<sup>th</sup> grader).

Brianna then goes on to discuss her lack of a close and trusting relationship with her mother as a primary contributor to her feelings of aloneness in the process of applying to college. Thus, these quotes from Ashleigh and her two daughters indicate that neither adolescent perceives her mother as a positive support. This lack of involvement appears to be a significant obstacle for Brianna, who has not taken strides towards achieving her goal of college because of the perceived absence of guidance. It is difficult to determine whether Ashleigh truly believes she is doing all she can for her daughters or if she was responding in a socially desirable way in the context of the interview. However, these adolescent perceptions of parental involvement seem to be quite important, particularly when achievement behaviors are suffering and the adolescent implicates the lack of parental support as playing a role in these circumstances.

Attending parent-teacher conferences was also a form of parental involvement described by parents across student achievement levels. Involvement with the school in this regard appeared to be somewhat of a basic or minimal way of being involved, since the process was school-initiated and most parents reported participating. In fact, the school tended to discourage parents of high-achieving adolescents from attending these conferences, but these parents were also the ones who were likely to attend regardless. Specifically, parents of high-achieving

adolescents claimed that they were interested in being informed about their children's school activities, regardless of performance. However, parent-initiated, more pro-active school involvement was less commonly reported and more unequally distributed by student achievement.

The types of parental involvement that were reported with dissimilar frequency depending on high or low student achievement were parental enrollment in academic enrichment programs, helping with homework and providing academic support, parent-initiated involvement with the school, and monitoring adolescent activities and whereabouts. Parents taking steps to involve adolescents in academic programs (PROG) and initiating school involvement by advocating on behalf of their child (ADV) were more common among parents of high-achieving adolescents ( $n = 5$  (19%) and  $n = 4$  (15%) among high achieving students respectively). These two parental behaviors in lower achieving students were occurring for 2 adolescents for each behavior, or 8% each. Homework assistance (HMWK) and parental monitoring (MON) were more common parental behaviors directed towards low-achieving adolescents ( $n = 5$  (19%) and  $n = 8$  (31%) among low achieving students respectively). Only one parent (4%) of a high achieving student reported helping with homework, and 12% ( $n = 3$ ) of high achieving students were experiencing parental monitoring. Figure 1 illustrates these differences.



**Figure 1. Differences in parental behavior among high & low achieving students**

As previously mentioned, parents who claimed to take it upon themselves to initiate contact with the school, or advocate on behalf of their children if they were unsatisfied with school personnel tended to be those with more highly achieving adolescents. The following quotes illustrate each of these forms of parental involvement respectively.

If I have a question or I need to talk to [school personnel], I'll call them and leave a message on their voice mail, they'll call me back. You know, we go to the meetings and do whatever we have to do, 'cause I do let them know that I am concerned about my child (Renay, mother).

"I had asked for [academic] help for her for 3 years, I mean I would literally sit outside the school and cry. And I just received some help last year from them, but it's too late, she already failed" (Lynn, mother). The general view of parents about the school was that teachers and administrators were not doing enough to help students succeed. Although parents sometimes had close, long-standing relationships with a few teachers or administrators, the

overall negative impression of the school did not spur all parents to action; instead only parents of high achieving students were likely to initiate interactions with the school.

Perhaps modeling action as a response to disagreement with decisions handed down by the school emphasized the power of the individual against the status quo for adolescents. If school decisions or actions are seen as potentially permeable to individual action, then adolescents may see their own success based on individual agency as a viable possibility, despite the expected developmental outcomes of those in high-risk environments.

High-achieving adolescents also were more likely to have parents who provided concrete support for academic goals by actively seeking out academic opportunities in which to enroll adolescents. “That’s why I’m trying to get him into every program possible, give him all the opportunities to get into a good college and get out of here” (Lynn, mother). These parents had an understanding of the importance of doing more than the minimum of receiving satisfactory grades in order to be competitive for post-secondary education (an aspiration all parents and almost all adolescents had).

The types of parental involvement that were more commonly reported among low-achieving adolescents were help with homework and monitoring of adolescent whereabouts and activities. The following is an example of the former.

When she has homework we try and all sit down at the table together. So, if she’s having a problem with something, I try and answer it or we’ll come up with a solution and I’ll say, “Well, talk to your teacher about this, because I’m not sure.” And, then we’ll look online, we’ll talk to her dad. You know, try and get things done (Shabannu, mother).

Although Shabannu discussed numerous ways in which she was supportive of her daughter Anna, who was more thoughtful and articulate than many other adolescents in the

sample (she was one of the few 9<sup>th</sup> graders), Anna was still performing poorly in school. Thus, perhaps Shabannu recognizes that consistent support beginning early in high school could be what Anna needs for her schoolwork to reflect her academic potential.

Since the majority of parents in this sample were highly involved in adolescents' lives, parents of adolescents who were not doing well in school may see assistance with homework as a more useful way of being involved than encouraging academic enrichment through program enrollment. In other words, boosting adolescent achievement through better grades on homework may be more immediately important and necessary before taking on other academic opportunities for those who are low-achieving.

The form of parental involvement that was most likely to occur among low achieving students was parental monitoring. The following is an example:

[Adolescence is] when they have access to really *do* more things compared to a young child as far as going out and try things when I'm not *around* with folks that I don't *know*. So this is the time when you do need to be really on and sort of...not really *on* them, but *with* them. It's just the peer pressure (Jim, father).

Jim goes on to discuss the importance of creating networks with other parents in the community so that disciplinary measures cannot be avoided by spending time at a friend's house whose parent is unaware of the rules pertaining to the visiting adolescent. He discusses smoking and underage drinking as primary concerns for his daughter, seeing these activities as things that could potentially distract one from academics and thus lead to slowing down on the path to eventual success.

Parents of low-achieving students were much more likely to discuss monitoring where adolescents were going, what activities adolescents were participating in, and who adolescent

peer groups consisted of. Monitoring may have been more necessary for these adolescents, since parents of high-achieving adolescents were more likely to claim that their children seldom spent time outside; breaking of the city-wide curfew for minors was not an issue for adolescents who primarily stayed close to home. This was in contrast to parents of low-achieving adolescents, some of whom had already dealt with police on occasion as a result of curfew breaking. Both parents and adolescents described the relationship of police with adolescent offenders as tense, which unfortunately may set the stage for less tolerance or more profiling of these adolescents as they mature and potentially engage in more interactions with police authorities, a circumstance which can serve as an obstacle to achievement and eventual success.

The finding that parents were reporting that high-achieving adolescents spent much of their time indoors may seem counter-intuitive at first, since one may assume that engaging in recreation around the community may be a characteristic common to high-achieving adolescents. This association may be appropriate in communities that boast ample resources, but in a low-income, urban community, positive forms of public recreation for adolescents are often sparse. Spending a great deal of time away from home as an adolescent without transportation in a resource-poor community can mean more exposure to negative influences such as drug dealing and gang activity, both of which are prominent issues in this community.

The next section compares the frequency and nature of reported parental involvement, as discussed in this section, with the occurrence of race-related socialization. The role of each of these variables for student aspirations and achievement is discussed to address the first research question: how are parental racial socialization messages related to student aspirations and achievement, in comparison to other involvement and other socialization messages parents may be giving?



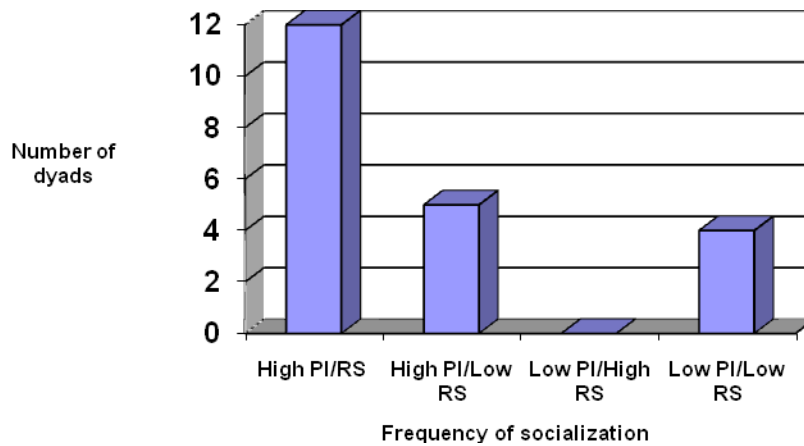
## **4.2 COMPARATIVE INFLUENCES OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND RACE-RELATED SOCIALIZATION ON ASPIRATIONS & ACHIEVEMENT**

The relation of interest for answering the first research question is racial socialization and student aspirations as well as achievement. An additional inquiry is how the association between racial socialization, student aspirations, and achievement compares to the association between general parental socialization and involvement with the student aspirations and achievement. First, frequencies of racial socialization are compared with parental involvement and general socialization.

The general (unrelated to race) types of parental socialization and involvement discussed thus far were more prevalent than race-related socialization. It seems likely that parental goals such as promoting achievement and protecting adolescents from negative influences in a high-risk environment may be more relevant on a daily basis than race-specific goals. Seventy percent of parents reported engaging in some form of racial socialization, whereas 46% reported engaging in racial socialization frequently; compared to 83% of parents in the sample being classified as generally highly involved in adolescents' lives.

High and consistent levels of parental involvement appeared to be a precursor for the occurrence of racial socialization, since the majority of highly involved parents also scored high on racial socialization (71%). The scope of socialization for highly involved parents may be wider to include race-related messages when there are more (and perhaps more positive) interactions occurring between parent and adolescent. Figure 2 shows the distribution of participants according to levels of general parental involvement and racial socialization. Parents of 36% of high achieving adolescents were engaging frequently in both forms of socialization. Twenty seven percent of high achievers fell into the second category of high involvement but

low racial socialization. And one high achieving adolescent had low involvement and low racial socialization from a parent.



**Figure 2. Frequency of parental involvement & racial socialization among participants**

Thus, general parental involvement and socialization appears to be positively linked with racial socialization. But how are each of these parental factors related to student aspirations and achievement? Despite indications that different general socialization messages may be emphasized for high versus low achieving students, higher levels of parental involvement per se (i.e., mutual agreement of parent and child that the parent was highly involved) were not clearly linked with higher GPA. However, 3 of the 4 students whose parents were not highly involved in their lives had GPAs below the mean. Although high reported parental involvement may not be clearly linked with higher GPA, perhaps low parental involvement is.

No clear relations emerged between high levels of racial socialization and student achievement. Despite the trend for most high achieving students to fall into the ‘high parental involvement, high racial socialization’ category, the differences were not big enough to draw the

conclusion that frequently engaging in these parental behaviors is strongly related to high achievement.

However, two types of race-related messages occurred at different rates for high versus low-achieving students, based on level of parental involvement. Highly involved parents of high-achieving students who had not yet provided race-related messages to their children were more likely to indicate that they planned to engage adolescents in such conversations in the future as the adolescent was exposed to more situations and particularly if the adolescent had questions or concerns regarding race. Five out of seven of the highly involved but little to no racial socialization parents fell into this category. For example, legal guardian Renee had not yet provided any explicit race-related messages to Raina, but she suggests “it needs to be talked about. So that they’re aware of it, and it’s a possibility that might happen. And how to handle it” (Renee, aunt/legal guardian).

These parents were those who were highly involved and communicative with adolescents in other aspects. For example, Renay had not yet discussed anything explicitly regarding race with her daughter Laquinta, but both parent and adolescent discussed a variety of other conversations they had had on making responsible choices in a high-risk environment. These included discussions on sexual activity, peers one associates with, and staying focused on one’s education.

On the other hand, in the group of minimally involved parents who were not providing racial socialization to (the sole) high achieving student in the group and the other low achieving students, no parent mentioned the possibility or necessity of this type of socialization occurring in the future. This trend adds evidence perhaps to the idea that racial socialization may be more likely to take place in the context of an involved parent-adolescent relationship.

Parents of low-achieving students who *were* engaging in racial socialization were more likely to emphasize racial socialization messages of openness and not judging others by skin color (18% of high achieving students versus 36% of low achieving students). For example,

I tell [my kids] the color of a person's skin, it doesn't matter. It's what's inside that counts and everything. I always say you have to treat people fair. You can't go judge them by the color of their skin (Wanda, mother).

The relation between emphasizing equality of races and low achievement may have been a reflection of openness being one of the most frequently given racial socialization messages and the fact that most parents reported being highly involved, although achievement levels varied. Assuming that high racial socialization when combined with high parental involvement is linked with poor achievement is a hasty conclusion, since other factors may be operating as important for achievement.

On the other hand, the possibility of supposed protective factors like racial socialization and parental involvement being positively linked with poor achievement should not be entirely dismissed. Since the majority of the students in this sample have almost completed their required education, high parental involvement (particularly in academics) may have been a characteristic that evolved over time for low-achieving students. Perhaps poor achievement throughout a student's years in school encourages high parental involvement when it becomes apparent that the student may need assistance to graduate and/or continue with higher education. An assessment of this variable during the concluding years of an adolescent's schooling may be capturing the evolved, end-product of parental involvement in the adolescent's academics.

Racial socialization may be occurring more frequently in highly involved parent – low achieving student dyads simply by being an aspect of communication that is more likely to occur

in close parent-adolescent relationships, a circumstance previously discussed. Or, perhaps parents who provide high levels of racial socialization yet have low-achieving students may have crossed over a ‘healthy’ level of racial socialization to an overemphasis on race, a behavior that may act in a debilitating way towards aspirations and achievement (Biafora et al., 1993). Even if the messages most provided focus on openness to others and equality of races, this is still a racial socialization message – continued emphasis of this belief may have a desensitizing effect on adolescents in terms of their buy-in.

Similar to the range of student achievement represented in the sample, there was a range of student aspirations, in terms of specificity and preparedness for future career goals. Even though all but one low achieving student in the sample aspired to continue education after high school, as well as future careers that required additional schooling beyond high school (or even beyond 4 years of college), not all were as knowledgeable about how to achieve these goals. Table 2 below illustrates these differences.

**Table 2. Adolescent groupings based on aspiration specificity scheme**

Aspiration category	# of students	% High achieving
Articulation & parental congruence	7	6 (86%)
Articulation	6	3(50%)
Parental articulation	1	0 (0%)
Lack of clear aspirations	12	1 (8%)

Six out of 26 students articulated clear aspirations for their plans after high school, as well as having an idea of what their chosen career paths entail, a plan for achieving their goals,

and parental awareness and support of what the adolescent aspired to. Five adolescents met the requirements of the previous category, but parental awareness and support of adolescent goals were not as evident. Only one student-parent dyad consisted of an adolescent who was less sure about how to prepare for her desired career path, whereas her mother was aware of her career choice *and* had ideas about how she could prepare. This circumstance may have been a reflection of the adolescent being one of the few 9<sup>th</sup> graders in the sample, and thus not yet actively planning for life after high school. Finally, nine students had no clear aspirations beyond going to college and/or did not have clear ideas of what they needed to do to be competitive for careers they were considering. Parental aspirations for these adolescents did not include anything more specific than a wish that the adolescent would be successful in whatever he or she aspired to.

The following quotes illustrate the respective differences between a student who would fall into the first category of aspiration articulation and parental congruence and a student who would fall into the last category of vague aspirations and minimal to no parental support.

[On what he needs to do to achieve aspirations of college and eventual career as an electrical engineer]: “Keep my grades up, first up. Then, fill out scholarship information, things like that. Take extracurricular things. Take some [college-level] classes along with that” (Jason, 11<sup>th</sup> grader). “I wanted him to be an engineer. I have big plans for him ‘cause he’s so bright and brilliant and has so much potential” (Lynice, Jason’s mother).

On the other end of the spectrum: [On why he aspires to be a real estate agent] “Not sure. I just thought I’d like to do that. I know that you buy houses and fix them. And sell them” (Leroy, 11<sup>th</sup> grader). “I want to see Leroy in the NFL. That’s been his dream since he was three. And I have no backup plan because that’s what Leroy’s gonna do” (Keysha, Leroy’s mother).

Jason had identified his top 3 college choices before the beginning of his junior year. He had also taken part in a Math & Science summer camp to expose himself to aspects of his favorite subjects that were not available class options at the high school. It seems evident that his mother is also highly supportive of his career goal. In contrast, Leroy and his mother have different ideas about what Leroy might be doing after high school. Leroy is later unable to list characteristics about himself that might make a real estate agent an appropriate choice for him. This, compounded with his lack of knowledge on what a real estate agent actually does, suggests he is not engaging in behavior to attain his aspirations.

These differences among students' aspirations translated into achievement differences as well. Eleven out of the twelve students in the last aspirations category had GPAs below the mean, while six out of seven of those in the first aspirations category had GPAs above the mean. This suggests a relation between achievement, realistic and efficient aspiration construction, and parental awareness and involvement in the process. No clear relations emerged between frequency of racial socialization messages or type of racial socialization and student aspiration construction. High levels of parental involvement also were not clearly linked with specificity of adolescent aspirations, and no particular type of parental involvement emerged as clearly important for adolescent aspiration construction above other types.

Thus, students with low achievement levels were less competent in thinking about future goals; parents of these students were also not clearly involved in the aspiration construction process. Parental awareness and support of goals that adolescents are "competently" thinking about could come about when adolescents share their plans with parents. A greater degree of aspiration specificity and knowledge about a potential future career path suggests that the adolescent has spent time thinking about these things and perhaps bringing these topics up with

parents. Parents may support adolescent career goals when it is clear that the adolescent is committed to said goals, Particularly in the context of a close relationship, a characteristic of most of the parent-adolescent dyads in this sample.

The next section addresses the second research question: are racial socialization messages important in constructing racial identity? And if so, does racial identity serve as a mechanism through which racial socialization, aspirations, and achievement are linked?

### **4.3 THE RELATION BETWEEN RACIAL SOCIALIZATION AND RACIAL IDENTITY**

The most common method for dispensing racial socialization messages to adolescents was reported to be through deliberate discussion. However, participants may also have been less likely to be consciously aware of indirect messages, such as the adolescent overhearing conversations that may have affected his or her beliefs, or parental actions that imply a race-related message. Some of these more indirect messages were recognized by adolescents as a form of racial socialization if these messages had a significant impact.

[I] always felt like [my mom]...looked down on me because of [my inter-racial relationship]. We'd be in the car and she'd be on the phone with a friend like, 'oh yeah, you know my daughter dates White guys.' Stuff like that. It's kind of embarrassing that my mom feels that way about me (Ellice, 12<sup>th</sup> grader).

In general, Ellice seemed sensitive to racial contexts in her daily life because of her long-standing relationship with a White male adolescent that was frowned upon by most of both students' family members. Although Ellice's mother Marie reported other, non race-related



factors being primary in her lack of support for her daughter's relationship (e.g., an overly serious relationship at a young age), Ellice discussed different opinions regarding race between her and her mother, a factor that seemed to exacerbate their already rocky relationship. This parent-adolescent dyad was quite unique: Marie made sure to be a central presence in Ellice's life regarding academics and personal issues, as well as frequently making attempts to racially socialize her daughter. But, because of their conflicted relationship and a race-related issue (a White boyfriend) being a point of contention, Ellice did her best to reject her mother's race-related messages and was minimally appreciative of her mother's involvement in other areas of her life.

A more indirect example that an adolescent reported, in the context of a parent-adolescent dyad that did not cite frequent occurrence of racial socialization: "My mom didn't let us play with White Barbie dolls or babies or whatever. They were always Black. Probably 'cause she wanted it to have a resemblance to us...I guess she just wanted us to know who we were" (Laquinta, 11<sup>th</sup> grader).

This instance is more representative of an adolescent making sense of a racial socialization behavior in the context of the interview. Ellice stating that she "always felt" a certain way indicates that her racial identity has already been developing, perhaps spurred by her relationship and her mother's reactions. Laquinta appears to be drawing meaning from a particular parental behavior she remembers; perhaps only consciously considering what her mother's selectiveness regarding dolls implied at the moment, in the interview.

The most common racial socialization messages reported by parents were preparation for bias (86% of parents who had reported any racial socialization described such messages), followed by openness to others (50%). The former refers to messages that are meant to make the

adolescent aware of racism and to prepare him or her mentally for situations where racism may occur. For example:

In society, being Black is tough, period. You're always stereotyped. You're always looked down upon. You're put on a different pedestal because maybe you're supposed to do better because you are Black. I always tell her, because you are Black, you have to do your best. Because you're gonna come across people, probably when you're in college, or it might be now, that... don't particularly care for you because you're African American (Roberta, mother).

Outside of here, if I go into a store and I'm dressed in jeans and sneakers, I might have someone following me around saying, "May I help you?" But, when I dress in heels and I wear a wig with straight hair and a suit, you know, they just kind of let me browse. And I've actually done things like that. They just let me browse and the things that they present me with are different, and the way they present things to me are different. So, you know, you have to carry yourself in a certain way, because the assumption is, as an African American, you're here, you're ghetto, you might cuss me out, I wonder if there's somebody else here with you who's stealing something (Shabannu, mother).

Although both parents and adolescents often agreed that their community was not an example of how things might be in the 'real world' (race-related tensions were not a major factor due to bonding over shared socioeconomic status), these preparation for bias messages seemed to be geared for when adolescents left high school and potentially the familiar, small community.

The next most common messages given were those of openness to others, including not judging others by skin color. "I tell Meshelle that you shouldn't dislike a person because of the color of their skin. You treat everybody the way you want them to treat you" (Roberta, mother).

“I explain to her that there are people who are racist, but it’s not a race that is racist” (Jim, father).

These messages of openness may serve as a follow-up to preparation for bias messages, in order to prevent the adolescent from being cynical about race relations or prematurely judging particular situations in life. The complementary nature of these messages was captured in a statement from a parent: “My only thought is that I don’t want him to be prejudiced, but I don’t want him to be ignorant to the fact that there is a lot of prejudice going on and you need to be aware” (Keysha, mother).

The aspects of racial identity that were most commonly discussed by adolescents in interviews were an awareness of racism as still prevalent in society (54%), and believing that one’s internal drive and motivation to succeed overshadows race-related obstacles in achieving ultimate success (39%). The following example captures the former:

People treat certain people different by the color of their skin and stuff. Say you get in trouble, and one of the police don’t like you ‘cause you’re Black, then they could charge you for stuff that you didn’t do (Tim, 11<sup>th</sup> grader).

Almost all of the examples of racism that adolescents spontaneously discussed were not so subtle racist occurrences. For example, racial profiling, racial preferences for school or job candidates, or differential teacher treatment based on race. Adolescents who cited these examples were consistent in believing these incidents took place because of racism. The harder to comprehend, more far-reaching concept of institutionalized racism was not something adolescents in this sample discussed. Perhaps this should not be considered unusual, since the subtle forms of racism that are interwoven into the fabric of our society are hard to detect and explain adequately even among adults.

An example of the also commonly discussed importance of internal characteristics over race-related obstacles:

I believe that it might be hard sometimes because I'm an African American and I'm a woman at the same time. But that's still not gonna stop me. I'm gonna do all I can do, even if they do discriminate, I'm gonna do all I can do to show them that it's not just that I'm African American, it's not just that I'm a woman, I can actually do this. And I can do it very well. And you don't have to look at all these layers (Anna, 9<sup>th</sup> grader).

Similar to the most commonly cited racial socialization messages, there is no indication that these aspects of racial identity are particularly important for high achievement, since both high and low achieving students exhibited these aspects. In fact, despite Anna's words of confidence and self-efficacy, her GPA was the lowest in the sample. This indicates that she may be seeking self-motivation from her beliefs, or her words may function more as a defense or coping mechanism for her poor academic performance. Perhaps her beliefs will be translated into more efficient academic behaviors as her time in high school continues.

For example, although Anna speaks of her race and gender as potential stumbling blocks, these characteristics also appear to provide impetus for overcoming the expectations that may be allotted to her given her gender and racial standing. Her motivation to succeed may eventually be translated into better self-regulation aimed at improving grades to ensure graduation and admittance to college.

The relation between parental socialization messages and adolescents' race-related beliefs seems apparent, considering the content of messages given and race-related beliefs discussed by adolescents (as an aspect of racial identity). The most common racial socialization messages reported by parents were preparing adolescents for bias and reminding adolescents not

to judge others by skin color. The most commonly reported adolescent race-related beliefs were an awareness of racism in society, and the importance of characteristics such as motivation for success rather than race-related variables. It seems that adolescents are taking in some of the most common parental racial socialization messages, since adolescent beliefs fit well with the race-related themes parents were most likely to mention. Thus, despite the lack of a strong association between frequent racial socialization and student achievement, it seems that the types of race-related messages given are linked with how adolescents construct their racial identities.

Interestingly, students who discussed awareness of racism specifically as it pertains to bias of authority figures (i.e., perceived racial profiling by police) were all students with GPAs below the mean. “Cause we have White cops. They treat Black people worse. I got arrested...my dad thought I did it. He thought I was the reason” (Meshelle, 9<sup>th</sup> grader).

As previously discussed, more of the low-achieving students had been admonished by parents about their activities outside of the home and obeying curfew. The students who mentioned awareness of racism from authority tended to discuss their own interactions with police, perhaps in relation to violation of curfew.

The aspect of racial identity that was next most common among adolescents: minimizing the importance of race as an influence on one’s success compared to internal drive, was mentioned more by high-achieving students (23% versus 13% of low-achieving students); perhaps due to their personal experiences with academic achievement. For example:

I hear a lot of people complaining about well, because you’re Black, and a White person will get the job before you, but it’s not really that. It’s just you have to want it more. Cause I’ve been to a number of different schools and...every school it’s been a different race higher than me. And, I’ve excelled pretty well in the school (Jason, 11<sup>th</sup> grader).

Interestingly, though Jason is adamant in refusing to recognize race as an influential factor on his success, he unconsciously makes a statement that illustrates how societal values about race have permeated his belief system. He claims that different races are ‘higher’ than him, implying that he is aware of where Blacks fall on the unspoken racial hierarchy in the US. Because Jason’s experiences indicate that he does not necessarily fit the stereotype, his consciously made statement about the unimportance of race may apply to him personally, but his *unconsciously* made statement suggests that race may not be as universally unimportant as he would like to believe.

Explicit mention of gaining a sense of pride from one’s racial identification was more likely to occur among low-achieving students. It may be that high-achieving students are more likely to focus on internal characteristics (e.g., drive) rather than racial membership as a source of pride and as important for their achievement.

Two aspects of racial identity that were not as common as those previously mentioned but more likely to occur among low-achieving students were (a) seeing oneself as a potential future role model for younger Black children, and (b) being optimistic about future opportunities available to Blacks. This optimism was often to the point of disagreement or dismissal of more cynical messages from family members or the community. Respective examples are as follows:

I don’t want to end up like one of these people on the streets in [the community]. I have to do something with my life. So I can come back, and like you know, like everybody can see, and all the kids can see that I did something with my life, so they can go out and do something with theirs (Becky, 11<sup>th</sup> grader)

“[I’ve been told] you have to step into reality. Just realize that it’s hard for the Black man. [Those ideas are] just nonsense” (Jermaine, 11<sup>th</sup> grader).

In fact, the role model aspect of racial identity was not mentioned once by high-achieving students, while 17% of low-achieving students mentioned this. The percentage of optimistic low-achieving students was also 17%, while only one high-achieving student mentioned this aspect. These aspects of racial identity may be acting as mental defense mechanisms against the obstacles faced by these adolescents on a regular basis (i.e., being confronted with the reality of limited opportunities available to those in the community, having this confirmed by messages from others) as well as a defense against their own poor achievement. One might argue about just how “protective” these beliefs are, if the students are not achieving highly.

Despite some of these isolated differences among high and low achieving students in constructing racial identities, and the link between aspirations and achievement, no clear cut associations between aspects of racial identity and specificity of aspirations emerged. The next section discusses the link between quantitative racial identity data, aspirations, and achievement.

#### **4.3.1 A quantitative conceptualization of racial identity**

Racial identity was also examined quantitatively by student scores on the MEIM to gain a fuller understanding of how this variable may be manifested in this sample based on already existing definitions. MEIM scores ranged from 2.08 to 3.83 ( $M = 2.80$ ,  $SD = .50$ ). A correlation coefficient was calculated for the association between GPA and MEIM scores. This was done to determine whether achievement might be linked with racial identity when the latter concept is operationalized in a different manner. There was a non-significant trend for students with higher GPAs to have higher MEIM scores ( $r = .37$ ,  $p = .07$ ). This finding can be interpreted in a few ways. Perhaps the more clearly defined, quantitative definition of racial identity (as MEIM scores) is linked with student achievement; an association that might have been significant if the

sample were larger. On the other hand, better grades in school could just mean that the student is more adept at completing quantitative measures thoughtfully, or a higher IQ could promote higher scores on each of these measures.

A high degree of racial socialization was modestly linked with higher scores (above 3.00) on the MEIM. High racial socialization was operationalized as both parent and adolescent agreeing that race-related messages had been given more than occasionally. Twice as many students in the high racial socialization group (about half of the sample) had high MEIM scores compared to the low racial socialization group. Thus, there is some evidence for criterion validity, as higher MEIM scores covary with a higher degree of parental racial socialization.

Interestingly, the aspects of racial identity assessed by the MEIM (focused on pride in one's racial identification) were not the most frequently discussed aspects of racial identity in adolescent interviews (minimizing the importance of race and awareness of race-related obstacles were). Those with high GPAs, regardless of MEIM score, were least likely to mention a sense of racial pride in their interviews. In fact, only two high-achieving adolescents, one with a high MEIM score and one with a low score, discussed racial pride. Just as many high-achieving adolescents with low MEIM scores were likely to mention minimizing race and awareness of obstacles as those with high MEIM scores ( $n = 6$ ). This suggests that the MEIM may be assessing an aspect of racial identity that is not as relevant for achievement, or how adolescents may spontaneously discuss their race-related beliefs. Those with high MEIM scores but low GPAs were more likely to discuss an awareness of race-related obstacles, perhaps suggesting a preoccupation with race-related barriers that may play a negative role in achievement level. Thus, qualitative data on racial identity added to understanding the variable for this sample, in terms of which specific aspects of racial identity are most common. Specifically, both



quantitative and qualitative conceptualizations of racial identity contributed uniquely to defining this variable.

In summary, high reported parental involvement was common throughout the sample. Due to the range of achievement represented, it was not clear that high parental involvement was in any way linked to higher adolescent achievement. However, the subset of parents who were minimally involved had primarily low-achieving adolescents. Thus, high parental involvement did not emerge as a clear protective factor for high-risk adolescents, but minimal involvement or support from the parent appeared to be a risk factor.

Some forms of parental involvement and support were common across the range of student achievement, but others occurred at dissimilar rates among high versus low-achieving students. However, parental involvement and general support occurred more often than racial socialization, though the former appeared to be a precursor for the latter to occur, as expected.

Similar to the relation between parental involvement and student achievement, there was no clear link between high levels of racial socialization and achievement. However, there were some messages that were common regardless of student achievement level and others that were more likely to occur among high achieving or low achieving students.

Student aspirations were linked most closely with achievement level, as expected. High achieving students tended to have more specific plans for the future as well to be making more progress towards achieving these goals. However, parental involvement and racial socialization were not linked with how well students constructed aspirations.

The most common race-related beliefs cited by adolescents were those that were similar to the most frequently dispensed racial socialization messages, suggesting a link between type of racial socialization and the beliefs that inform one's racial identity. Some aspects of racial

identity occurred more frequently among high versus low achieving students. However, there was no relation between racial identity data and aspirations, despite suggestions in the literature indicating that these variables are positively linked. The near significant association between high scores on the *MEIM* and higher GPA suggests a link between these variables when racial identity is conceptualized tightly by an established quantitative measure; perhaps a relation that would be more reliable if the sample were larger. The qualitative conceptualization of racial identity made in this study may have yielded more data than a quantitative measure, but this data may be harder to draw patterns and conclusions from due to the less structured, ‘looser’ nature. Racial socialization was also modestly linked with *MEIM* scores. Fifty percent of those in the high racial socialization group had high *MEIM* scores, versus 29% in the low racial socialization group.

The next section will synthesize the findings of this study with what is known in the literature about the connection between both parental involvement and racial socialization and student aspirations and achievement. This should add to the understanding of resiliency in high-risk students.

## **5.0 DISCUSSION**

According to cited research, being in a high-risk environment often means experiencing more challenges to success than positive factors (Rutter, 1990). It follows that protective factors, although useful, are rare in these environments. A supportive adult presence during the adolescent period in high risk environments has especially been touted as a significant protective factor (Kohl et al., 2000; Smokowski et al., 2000). Thus, in light of existing research, it was surprising to find that the majority of participants (both parents and adolescents) in this study perceived their relationships with each other as close and supportive.

When comparing the importance of racial socialization messages and more general supportive parental characteristics for adolescent aspirations and achievement in the context of the first research question, the finding that general parental involvement and support were more common was not unexpected. It seems likely that the wider range of behaviors this “protective” factor includes would be more likely to occur than specific race-related socialization. For example, although both high parental involvement and high racial socialization have been found to have protective effects for student aspirations and achievement (Connell et al., 1994; Hill et al., 2004; O’Connor, 1997; Oyserman et al., 1995), parental involvement has also been linked with increased social control (i.e., establishing collaborative relationships with school personnel, knowledge of behavioral expectations), aspects of parental behavior that can play a positive role in student achievement (Epstein & Sanders, 2002; McNeal, 1999).

Racial socialization on the other hand, is linked with adolescent racial identity, which plays a role in achievement (Marshall, 1995; Miller, 1999; Sanders Thompson, 1994), a phenomenon that might not be as prevalent unless some of the precursors for the importance of racial socialization exist (e.g., living in a predominantly White community, being an adolescent) (Hughes & Chen, 1997; Thornton et al., 1990). Thus, general parental involvement may be a protective factor that is more encompassing, in terms of student academic behaviors, than the more specific racial socialization. However, past estimates of the occurrence of racial socialization ranging from 73% - 85% of adolescent and adult samples claiming they had experienced such messages (Biafora et al., 1993; Sanders Thompson, 1994) are comparable to the 70% occurrence of racial socialization reported in this sample. Frequency of racial socialization in this sample may have been slightly lower compared to other Black populations due to the unique race relations in this community. The community is predominantly White, but Black inhabitants make up a sizable proportion (United States Census Bureau, 2000). Despite the history of housing segregation in this area, several parents did not see race-related tensions as a major issue in the community, instead citing lack of resources due to poverty and gang and drug activity as primary concerns.

Thus, despite previous research suggesting that racial socialization is an important protective factor for achievement (Constantine & Blackmon, 2002; Miller, 1999; O'Connor, 1997), the association did not emerge in this sample. Similarly, the connection between frequent parent involvement and high achievement, which has been established in the literature (Connell et al., 1994; Hill, 2001; Hill et al., 2004), was not clearly evident in this sample. The disproportionate number of highly involved parents in the sample may have precluded the positive association between involvement and achievement from being apparent. Perhaps a

larger, more representative sample of the range of parental involvement that can occur in a high risk sample would lead to support for parental involvement as a protective factor.

Because parental consent was mandatory before adolescents could participate in this study, adolescents who may have been interested in the study but had less than adequate relationships with caregivers (i.e., did not feel close enough to caregivers or rarely interacted with caregivers due to conflicting school and work schedules) may have opted out of study participation due to the initial hurdle of discussing study consent with a caregiver. Additionally, some parents repeatedly cancelled interview appointments or did not show, striking them from the sample as well. If these parents could have been included, perhaps the nature of parental involvement in this sample would have looked somewhat different.

On the other hand, the possibility must be considered that parental involvement is *not* necessarily protective in this population. Even though highly involved parents usually have good intentions, low-income parents may not have a great deal of expertise on completing a high school education and thinking about college or job options afterwards, depending on how their own education and career trajectories proceeded (Kohl et al., 2000).

Several parents in this sample claimed to be doing everything in their power to support their adolescents' education, but also admitted their lack of familiarity with school subject matter and the college application process. In fact, not one parent of an 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> grader in the sample explicitly mentioned assistance with the college application process as a way in which the adolescent was being supported; despite almost all adolescents in the sample aspiring to attend college. This speaks to research suggesting that low-income, marginalized parents may view their parental involvement role as quite different, yet complementary, to the school's role (Lopez, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001). Although parents often mentioned being involved

in the college decision-making process, actual filling out of applications may be perceived as within the school's domain of expertise.

The most common parental behaviors that occurred in this sample regardless of student achievement fell into the relationship category code. Specifically, parents in this sample emphasized the closeness of their relationships with adolescents as a context for transferring values. The area in which parents of high-achieving and low-achieving adolescents differed was explicit supportive behaviors and school involvement. Parents of high achievers were likely to engage in different behaviors (e.g., enrolling in academic programs) within these categories than parents of low achievers (e.g., helping with homework). An additional example: high achieving adolescents' parents were more likely to initiate involvement with the school on behalf of their child, whereas low achievers' parents were more likely to mention attending conferences as the extent of their involvement with the school.

As discussed in the findings, parental assistance with homework was quite common among low-achieving students, which could be interpreted as parents recognizing the extra support a low-achieving adolescent needs, or as a hindrance; low-achieving adolescents who received parental help on homework may have developed a sense of dependence, not fully learning the material and not independently striving to achieve higher.

Thus, in a low-income high-risk community, all types of parental involvement and support may not be beneficial. Beyond explicit, supportive parental acts such as help with the college application process or enrolling in academic programs (the latter behavior was found to be more common among parents of high-achieving students in this sample), perhaps adolescents' internal factors such as autonomy and self-motivation are more important for successful developmental outcomes.

An association between frequency of racial socialization and achievement was also not present, but a number of factors may have been operating to prevent this relation from being apparent as well. Parental social desirability may have played a role in the degree of racial socialization reported. Parents were aware that race-related questions would be asked by the investigator from the informed consent, though relationships of interest between variables being studied were not divulged. However, because racial socialization was one of the focal points of the interview, parents may have exaggerated their recollections of engaging in race-related socialization with their children.

A larger sample may not have necessarily led to different findings, since the decision to discontinue recruitment was made when saturation of qualitative data was reached. Some research suggests that racial socialization may be more likely to occur as a protective factor in a racially mixed environment (Thornton et al., 1990). Although both Black and White students are represented at the high school, the school is predominantly Black (despite the community being predominantly White). Thus, racial socialization may still be present, but perhaps not as potent a protective factor if students do not perceive themselves threatened by the majority. In fact, low socioeconomic status seems to be the circumstance that community inhabitants bond over, rather than racial identification. For example,

Because, if we make the same wages, then we're on the same level. If we have the same houses, we're on the same level. If we drive the same cars, we're on the same level. Even though you're still having those same conversations you can't use my comb. It doesn't necessarily affect the fact that I'm going to braid your hair anyway (Shabannu, mother).

Shabannu speaks to the blurring of racial lines in the community because everyone has the same socioeconomic status. She acknowledges that racial differences are still there (e.g., 'you

can't use my comb'), but not significant enough to be divisive in the community (e.g., 'I'm going to braid your hair anyway), according to her perceptions.

Positive associations between parental involvement, racial socialization, and adolescent aspiration construction were also not clear. However, adolescents with specific aspirations tended to be more highly achieving. Low-achieving students were concentrated in the category of least clear aspirations. Having a more accurate understanding of one's strengths and inclinations based on a combination of one's own beliefs as well as feedback from others can translate into applying oneself in domains where one is more likely to succeed (Anderman, Anderman, & Griesinger, 1999; Connell et al., 1994). It follows that those who are aware of their competencies and set personal goals accordingly (e.g., appropriate aspiration construction), are able to attain higher achievement; since these individuals have a clearer idea of what they are striving toward. Thus, a relation with achievement and aspirations emerged, particularly for those students with clear aspirations and parental awareness and support of these goals. Perhaps parental awareness and support of adolescent goals is a more relevant manifestation of a close, supportive parent-adolescent relationship (as opposed to types of involvement); a factor that, in this sample, may indirectly influence both aspirations and achievement.

Turning to the second research question which asks about the importance of racial socialization for adolescent racial identity, an association emerged between the most frequently given racial socialization messages and the race-related beliefs adolescents were most likely to discuss. Cautionary, preparation for bias messages were most frequently reported by parents. Adolescents were most likely to report discussion about their knowledge and awareness that racism is a prevalent problem. The second most common messages reported by parents focused on nonjudgmental attitudes towards others (i.e., not judging others on race). Adolescents' next



most common beliefs discussed were focusing on internal drive and motivation rather than race as factors for success.

This fits with some past research suggesting that preparation for bias and egalitarian types of racial socialization are more common than racial pride messages (Marshall, 1995; Sanders Thompson, 1994). Previous research has also claimed that a lack of race-specific socialization is more common for younger children (i.e., more focus on dedication and hard work) (Marshall, 1995; Peters, 1985; Spencer, 1983). Both deliberate racial socialization and the possibility of an individual having a race-related experience and turning to a parent for information are more likely to occur in adolescence (Biafora et al., 1993; Hughes & Chen, 1997; Marshall, 1995; Stevenson, 1995). This matches with current findings, since racial socialization was reportedly occurring in the majority of the sample, and cautionary messages were the most common.

Similar to how certain aspects of parental involvement and racial socialization were more or less common between high and low achieving students, some aspects of racial identity were reported differently for higher versus lower achieving students. Perhaps focusing more on internal characteristics for success, the aspect of racial identity that occurred more in high-achieving students, functions in a protective manner for achievement in this sample. These high-achieving students' experiences of surpassing others' expectations for success (often based on race and class) could foster a belief in racial membership as not being a primary factor in one's success.

On the other hand, race-related factors seemed to be more prevalent in the minds of low-achieving students. This seems reasonable, considering that these students were more aware of alleged racial biases of authority figures as well as the possibility of racial membership serving

as a platform for positively influencing others. These students' beliefs may be more permeable to messages from others about the importance of race in determining one's success; perhaps the latter positive manifestation of racial identification is a coping mechanism for dealing with (mostly pessimistic) messages from others about the likelihood of success as a Black adolescent from a low-income community.

The finding that racial pride was more likely to occur among low-achieving students in this sample runs contradictory to some research that suggests deriving positive feelings from one's racial identification can be a significant source of motivation (resulting in higher achievement) for resilient Black students (Constantine & Blackmon, 2002; Miller, 1999; O'Connor, 1997). However, the importance of context should be emphasized, since a number of external factors that may play a role in achievement likelihood could be acting to diminish the relationship between a positive racial identification and achievement (e.g., school culture, available resources).

A modest association between the qualitative data on parental racial socialization and quantitative data on adolescent racial identity also emerged. The relation may not have been as strong between that of racial socialization data and qualitative racial identity data, perhaps because the *MEIM* focuses more on exploration of one's racial identity and positive feelings about one's racial membership. Though racial pride messages (which may be more congruent with aspects of racial identity assessed by the *MEIM*) did occur in the repertoire of racial socialization messages that occurred in this sample, they did not occur as commonly as cautionary and egalitarian messages. However, the existence of an association between higher levels of racial socialization and higher *MEIM* scores suggests that the quantitatively assessed aspects of racial identity are linked with racial socialization messages, albeit in a manner unique

from qualitative racial identity. As discussed in findings, the MEIM and students' discussions of race-related beliefs appeared to be capturing different aspects of the racial identity concept.

## **5.1 ADDITIONAL FINDINGS AND SUMMARY**

The high levels of parental involvement and support reported in this sample allowed for identification of a variety of forms this factor might assume. Much of the previous research on this topic has focused on parental involvement within the school (Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Hill et al., 2004) or parent and teacher reports of parental involvement and support based on quantitative measures (Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Kohl, 2000). The qualitative method of data collection for this study provided a unique understanding of parental involvement and support from the perspectives of both parents and adolescents, the two parties participating in the relationship. Due to this in-depth look at parental involvement and support, a number of ways parents provided support to their children during the high school years were identified, as well as dissimilarities in types of support across student achievement levels. For example, parents who involved themselves with the school of their own accord demonstrated an active interest in their children's schooling, and were more likely to have high-achieving adolescents in this sample. This is in line with other research findings that suggest voluntary parental involvement with the school is often linked with high-achieving students, whereas parents who are compelled to involve themselves with the school are more likely to find themselves in that situation due to student disciplinary problems or poor academic performance (Epstein, 1996).

Using quantitative measures or relying primarily on teacher reports (who is an outsider to the relationship and may only provide some insight into school involvement) may not capture

some of the nuances of parental involvement. Research suggests that parental involvement may be less frequent for adolescents in high-risk environments compared to adolescents in more privileged environments (Lareau, 1996; 2003). But perhaps analyzing parent involvement more closely through qualitative modes of data collection suggests otherwise.

Nevertheless, despite the majority of parents and adolescents in this sample perceiving their relationships as supportive, it seems apparent that parental involvement manifests itself differently in this high-risk sample compared to students and parents with racial and economic privilege. For example, only 1 parent-student dyad fit the category of the parent thinking more actively about adolescent aspirations and how to achieve them than the student. Perhaps this circumstance would be more common among higher SES families, where parents are able to devote more physical and mental resources to scaffolding adolescent goal construction and completion.

In fact, the over-involvement of parents in economically privileged families has been documented as ‘helicopter parenting,’ a circumstance where the adolescent may actually be less adept at autonomous self-regulation since the parent dominates decisions that need to be made (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Wilson, 2004). Although this may not be the most beneficial situation in terms of fostering adolescent independence, this extra support from adults who are well-acquainted with the level of competition for college admissions and the accompanying process (most likely due to having gone through it themselves) puts high-risk adolescents who are navigating high school primarily by themselves at an even greater disadvantage when it comes to pursuing higher education.

Thus, protective factors are arguably quite important for high-risk student achievement, but the expected associations between the protective factors under study and achievement were

not strongly evident. Some of the relations that did emerge in this sample (e.g., the link between parental involvement and racial socialization, the association between specific aspirations and achievement) are perhaps stronger or more clearly established connections that were evident with the sample size and methods utilized. Viewing parental involvement and racial socialization as protective factors should not be dismissed in light of the current study findings, particularly since their connections to positive outcomes have been established in the literature. Instead, attention should be turned to the limitations of this study that may have prevented the relations of interest from clearly emerging.

## **5.2 LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Although the sample size was adequate for qualitative data collection in terms of reaching saturation for the variables of interest, a larger sample size could have been more representative of parental behaviors, since this sample was skewed towards highly involved and supportive parents, and 11<sup>th</sup> graders. If more adolescents from other grades had participated, a fuller picture of how parental involvement and racial socialization evolve based on the developmental level of the adolescent may have emerged.

Multiple operationalizations of achievement may have been helpful as well; operationalizing achievement in a different way may have provided a more valid conceptualization of the variable. The large effect sizes for tests of student gender and grade playing a role in GPA indicate low power. Thus, gender and/or grade level may have been correlated with GPA, reducing the degree to which this is a ‘true’ measure of achievement. Since the sample is disproportionately female and primarily consists of 11<sup>th</sup> graders, it appears that

these factors may be important to consider for students' GPAs. It would be erroneous to assume no significant differences exist based on gender or grade, despite the lack of actual significant results. The sample size is not large enough to yield an appropriate level of power to validly come to these conclusions.

Additionally, GPA is a more subjective measure than standardized tests; the former measure is vulnerable to teacher perceptions, grading norms within a school, and other miscellaneous circumstances (e.g., an adolescent failing an exam but being allowed to complete extra credit due to a close relationship with a teacher, parental involvement on behalf of a student to raise a class grade). However, students' cumulative GPAs were the most complete form of achievement data available; standardized test scores were missing for several students, making it difficult to draw conclusions from these data.

A larger sample size may also have made it possible to collect useful quantitative data on the variables of interest. Although this was done for racial identity, the modest association that emerged between qualitative data on racial socialization and student MEIM scores may have been stronger if an additional quantitative measure of racial socialization were used with a larger sample. Correlating qualitative with quantitative data is not as rigorous a process from which conclusions can be reliably drawn as a correlation between two established quantitative measures. Furthermore, a larger sample would have allowed conclusions to be drawn more confidently.

In addition to sample size constraining the conclusions that can be drawn, the characteristics of this sample limit generalization of findings. These findings should only be seen as a description of the nature of parental involvement and racial socialization for this particular population: low income, Black adolescents in an urban fringe community. Parental involvement

and racial socialization may look different for Black families not willing to participate in research and/or Black families in more urban or rural areas, since internal factors like suspiciousness or aloofness and external circumstances such as economic opportunities (i.e., work options affecting how involved parents are) and race relations can play a role in how these parental behaviors are manifested. Parental involvement in the lives of middle class Black adolescents may look quite different as well.

Finally, investigator characteristics play an unquantifiable role in how participants interact during an interview and what is disclosed. Investigator age, race, and gender are all characteristics that may (consciously or not) affect participant responses. Although I was recognized as a person of color, it was apparent to both adolescents and parents that I was ‘other’, a realization that could have limited the freedom with which race-related topics were discussed. My unique position as a researcher in the school community may have played a role for adolescents as well.

It was clear that I was not faculty, but I was also not one of the students. Thus, despite my presence in the school as a researcher for a few years before this study was undertaken, some adolescents may not have been themselves during the interview process. Anecdotally, some students who I knew to be boisterous both inside and outside of the classroom were often reserved and polite in interviews, perhaps because my responsibilities did not include disciplining them. Finally, my (relatively young) age may have played a role in whether or not parents were able to take me seriously as an interviewer. For example, one parent mistakenly assumed I was a high school student conducting a class project. These possibilities are merely speculations on how investigator characteristics may have affected the nature of data obtained.

Unfortunately, there is no precise measure of exactly how my characteristics influenced participant answers.

The next step in this investigation could involve going more in-depth with the qualitative data collected. Students and parents were only interviewed at one point in time. Multiple interviews of both parties could provide insight into how parental behaviors change over time as adolescents develop, as well as how adolescent beliefs mature. For example, the extent of race-related socialization or the specificity of an adolescent's aspirations may look quite different in 9<sup>th</sup> grade compared to 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Multiple sources could also be useful, since only parents and adolescents were the focus in this investigation. However, when considering racial socialization as a viable protective factor for adolescents in this sample, it is important to keep in mind that no strong evidence emerged in this exploratory study, perhaps precluding the need to study this particular variable in more depth as something that figures importantly in adolescent achievement. Interviewing teachers could provide an outsider's perspective on parental involvement and academic support, particularly in terms of collaborating with the school. Other family members could be a source of information (or of support for the adolescent) as well.

Based on the limitations mentioned, another recommendation for future research would be to craft a study utilizing both qualitative and quantitative methods with a larger sample in order to examine the associations of interest more thoroughly. For example, including a quantitative measure of parental involvement such as Epstein's *Parental Involvement Survey* (1995) could capture the nuances of school-related involvement that may not always be discussed spontaneously in an interview context. It may also be important to consider having multiple interviewers (particularly of the same race as participants, if race-related messages are a topic of interest) to assess how interviewer characteristics could affect data obtained. The value



of this research and future endeavors from an applied perspective are discussed in the next section.

### **5.3 IMPLICATIONS**

The goal of this research was to identify the nature of parental protective factors viewed as important for low-income, Black adolescents' aspirations and achievement. A better understanding of some of the factors that may benefit these adolescents for school success is important, since the risk of poor academic outcomes is evident for this population, based on previous research (Halle et al., 1997; Harris & Herrington, 2006; Lee, 2002). Current findings show that parents report the level of their involvement and racial socialization similarly, but may differ in how they carry each out when they are raising a high versus low achieving adolescent. Attention should be paid to whether or not the types of involvement common among parents of low-achieving students eventually help bolster school success, since the overarching agenda is to raise achievement levels among poorly performing high-risk students and ultimately lessen the achievement gap.

Although the focus here is on parental factors that may be important for adolescent success in school, it should not be assumed that variables within the parent-adolescent relationship are not amenable to change through supportive interventions. Creating a more inviting space for parents to interact with school personnel may lead to more parents voluntarily engaging themselves with the school (an aspect of parental involvement that was linked with higher achievement in this study). A qualitative study on effective schools that served high-risk students, primarily migrant students in this case, found that the school's initial outreach to the

parent (i.e., “going down to the parent’s level” (p. 272) was a key component for fostering a future dynamic and equal relationship (Lopez et al., 2001).

In turn, parents may be able to more efficiently provide the types of involvement associated with eventual academic success among low-achieving students by being more involved at the school level. Specifically, parental assistance with homework and monitoring (arguably both important aspects of involvement) were more common among low-achieving students in this sample. If the school can support parental involvement, parents can be more aware of expectations regarding homework and perhaps provide more efficient assistance at home (i.e., involvement most beneficial to the student in terms of achieving academically). And interacting with the school on a regular basis can lead to networking with other, like-minded parents, which could foster a network outside of school to collaboratively monitor each other’s children.

The range of aspirations and achievement represented in this sample despite the mostly high levels of involvement described by parents may only be a glimpse of the entire range of adolescent aspirations and achievement, since minimally involved parents were apparently not a significant portion of the sample. If these parent-adolescent dyads could have been included, perhaps a more sobering picture would have emerged, with a greater number of adolescents not citing college as a future aspiration, or being on the verge of dropping out as a result of poor achievement. Indeed, only one of four adolescents experiencing a minimal amount of parental involvement and support was high achieving. A lack of parental involvement in a high risk environment should be given serious consideration as a risk factor, one that schools can work against.

This can be undertaken in a number of ways, such as requiring parent signatures for homework completion, or having workshops that foster parental involvement (e.g., concrete suggestions for supporting adolescent aspirations, information sessions on colleges and alternative options). A consideration to keep in mind is that parents, particularly those who are marginalized, may have different ideas about their roles in their children's schooling from what school administrators expect or believe them to be (Lopez et al., 2001). Thus, traditional forms of parental involvement that are fostered by the school (e.g., participation in school functions, guidelines for conducting 'school-like' activities at home) are still the preferred interactions that schools work to increase. However, these activities implicitly comment on the parents' ability to provide an appropriate home learning environment. Thus, particularly for minority and/or marginalized parents, it is important for the school to amass knowledge on how parents in the community are involved and expect to be involved with their children's academics. Building a collaborative relationship with school staff and parents can encourage building of a participant-informed (the parents, in this case) model of ideal parental involvement for a particular school, one that teachers, parents, and students all contribute to, since all parties have a stake in eventual academic outcomes of the student.

Although financial resources may be seen as a barrier for implementing such measures, enlisting the voluntary support of motivated individuals within the community or recruiting experienced college and graduate students to participate in a school-wide effort to increase parental involvement and student achievement are ways to circumvent a lack of funds or conventional resources.

## **5.4 CONCLUSION**

The goal of this exploratory study was to evaluate the importance of parental involvement and racial socialization as protective factors for adolescent success in school, two constructs that have often been dealt with separately in the literature. Although frequency of parental involvement and racial socialization were not clearly linked with student aspirations and achievement in this study, parental involvement and racial socialization were linked with each other, as were aspirations and achievement.

Some of the few differences that emerged in this study between high and low achieving students included how parents interacted with adolescents as well as how adolescents conceived their racial identities and aspirations. It seems that even in an environment where students are often expected to perform poorly, a range of school success and preparedness for the future exists. Ideally, these findings will spur future research that can provide answers as to how best intervene with poorly performing, high risk students, as well as support the goals of higher achieving students from similar environments.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

- What do you want to be when you grow up?
- Where did you get this idea...where do your ideas about future goals/careers come from, in general?
- What are your plans after high school?
- What steps will you be taking during the rest of high school to achieve these plans?
- Is there anything you are unsure about or that you think will be a challenge in reaching your goals? Like what? How do you deal with this?
  
- What types of things are you doing right now towards achieving this goal?
- What things do you think you need to be doing, or will be doing?
  
- How would you describe yourself? Think about parts of yourself that are important to you and make you who you are.
- (If academic self is not brought up...) How would you describe yourself as a student?
- How important do you think education is for success? In what ways specifically?
- Who or what do you think has played a big part in how you view yourself?  
(Peers? Parents? Other family members? Role models? Religion, sports, etc.?)
  
- (If not brought up voluntarily) Can race be a factor in someone's opportunity for success? Why or why not?
- Do people of all races have equal chances to do well in school? Why or why not?
- Are there people who have better opportunities now when compared to the past? Who? What makes you think so?
- How important is race to YOU?
  - in terms of who you are?
  - where you will go in life?
  - race-related constraints?

- How would you define racism?
- Was race a topic that was discussed in your home while you were growing up? In what kinds of ways (what were these conversations about?)
- What kinds of things were told or shown to you regarding race?
- What did you hear others talking about?
- Were most messages you received about race things told directly to you, or things you overheard?

Is there anything else you want to talk about that wasn't brought up so far? Do you have any questions for me?

## **APPENDIX B**

### **PARENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

First I would like to ask you some questions about your hopes and expectations for your son/daughter, and then I would like to talk about your relationship with him/her.

- What are your expectations for your child?
- Where do they come from?
- How are they similar or different from what you think your child expects of him or herself?
- What kinds of things have you been doing to support your child's education?
- Are there things you wish you could be doing? What sorts of things stand in the way of this?
- Are there things you plan to do? Like what?
- Do you foresee any obstacles standing in the way of your child's success?
- (If race is not brought up voluntarily...) How do you think being Black/African American affects your child's life?
- Is this something you have discussed with him or her? How do you go about deciding what to tell him or her?
- When your child was growing up, how often were issues regarding race discussed?
- Did you make it a point to talk about these things or was it usually a result of questions from your child?
- What kinds of things specifically did you tell or show your child regarding race?
- Looking back now, would you have given your child those same messages, or is there anything you would have told/done differently?
- How would you define racism?

Is there anything else you would like to talk about? Do you have any questions for me?

## APPENDIX C

### THE MULTI-ETHNIC IDENTITY MEASURE

In this country, people come from many different countries and cultures, and there are many different words to describe the different backgrounds or ethnic groups that people come from. Some examples of the names of ethnic groups are Hispanic or Latino, Black or African American, Asian American, Chinese, Filipino, American Indian, Mexican American, Caucasian or White, Italian American, and many others. These questions are about your ethnicity or your ethnic group and how you feel about it or react to it.

Please fill in: In terms of ethnic group, I consider myself to be \_\_\_\_\_

Use the numbers below to indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

**(4) Strongly agree    (3) Agree    (2) Disagree    (1) Strongly disagree**

- 1- I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs.
- 2- I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members of my own ethnic group.
- 3- I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means for me.
- 4- I think a lot about how my life will be affected by my ethnic group membership.
- 5- I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to.
- 6- I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group.
- 7- I understand pretty well what my ethnic group membership means to me.
- 8- In order to learn more about my ethnic background, I have often talked to other people about my ethnic group.
- 9- I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group.
- 10- I participate in cultural practices of my own group, such as special food, music, or customs.
- 11- I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group.
- 12- I feel good about my cultural or ethnic background.



13- My ethnicity is

- (1) Asian or Asian American, including Chinese, Japanese, and others
- (2) Black or African American
- (3) Hispanic or Latino, including Mexican American, Central American, and others
- (4) White, Caucasian, Anglo, European American; not Hispanic
- (5) American Indian/Native American
- (6) Mixed; Parents are from two different groups
- (7) Other (write in): \_\_\_\_\_

14- My father's ethnicity is (use numbers above)

15- My mother's ethnicity is (use numbers above)

## APPENDIX D

### RACIAL SOCIALIZATION CODE LIST

#### I. No racial socialization

- a. PLAN – no RS yet, but predicts RS will occur as adolescent becomes older, starts asking questions.
  - i. *But [RS] will come, because I've seen it in the work force, so it does happen, it is out there. And I think it needs to be talked about. So that they're aware of it, and it's a possibility that might happen. And how to handle it. ~ Renee, mother*
- b. DIS – dismissal of RS messages as necessary, none given and none foreseen in future
  - i. *She gets along with a couple of her White girl friends and things like that. Yeah, and I ain't prejudice, so it doesn't... I don't even get into that. ~ Ashleigh, mother*

#### II. Historical/cultural socialization

- a. HIS – discussing race relations from a historical perspective (e.g., Civil Rights movement). May be from personal experiences of an older adult, or more of a history lesson.
  - i. *I let her know how it was when I came up. I went to all Black schools. And I let her know how we was treated. Because I came up during the time when the water fountain says 'colored' and 'white'. ~ Josephine, grandmother*
- b. PRIDE – instilling positive messages about accomplishments of Blacks, or having an awareness/pride in oneself based on roots.
  - i. *That's something I try to install in my children. Being a minority is really...maybe there was a time when it was a bad thing. When it was a shameful thing, a shunned thing. But you know, since then, minorities have progressed. And minorities have established a standard now, maybe generations haven't kept that standard. But there's a standard that's already been established. ~ Vanessa, mother*

### III. Cautionary messages

- a. PREP - preparation for bias: making adolescent aware of challenges he/she may face due to race. Includes pre-conceived notions from others
  - i. *You know, being a African American, yeah that concerns me a lot. It's hard for them out there in the world and stuff. Even with a lot of education, it do worries me. ~ Wanda, mother*
  - ii. PREP-b – challenges particular to being a Black male discussed, or mention of emphasizing different things to children based on gender.
    - a. *People seem to want to help the African American female succeed. More so than African American male. My sons...you have to behave well, you cannot get in trouble, you cannot punch people out, you cannot be on the corner with your friends who are selling drugs. Because it won't take long before you're in the system, even if you're doing nothing. ~ Shabannu, mother*
- b. TRUST – encouraging adolescent to 'stick to own'...members of other races are not to be easily trusted. Includes a preference for dating members of one's own race
  - i. *I wasn't all that wholeheartedly interested in him meeting up and having a relationship with a girl of the other race, but it seems like he's more or less geared to that.~ Lana, mother*
- c. PRST – personal presentation, importance of dressing/looking a certain way to minimize the judgments someone can make.
  - i. *I let him know you can be judged by the clothes you wear. That can affect you. You'll be stereotyped. You are stereotyped. ~ Keysha, mother*
  - ii. *We ask her to present herself in a certain way... don't be outside after hours wearing certain kinds of clothes. It will be assumed you're doing something wrong. ~ Shabannu, mother*

### IV. Egalitarian messages

- a. OPEN – importance of not judging others by skin color, paying more attention to who someone is as a person.
  - i. *As he goes out into the world and meet other people and interacts with them socially, that he's able to accept them as a person, rather than based on the color of their skin. ~ Lana, mother*
  - ii. *I explain to her that there are people who are racist, but it's not a race that is racist. ~ Jim, father*
- b. AGENT – believing in individual power to institute change (can be instilling this msg. directly through conversation, or acting in own life as a model).
  - i. *I've always felt that I'm an extension of [my son's education]. I need to be involved. I guess that's why I'm sitting here as a para-professional and to some degree, as an educator, wherein what my child's gonna benefit from, some other person's child is going to benefit also. ~ Lana, mother*
  - ii. *Within our own, within the African American race there is not stability. I'm talking about as far as emotional stability. And we're not as close as we should be. We're not as supportive of one another as we should be.*

*And actually that's been something that's been an issue for a very long time, if not forever. I want her, as an individual, I have to build her self-esteem up. And the coat that she's in. So that she feel comfortable with herself so she can encourage herself and be able to encourage people like her in the same coat. ~ Vanessa, mother*

## APPENDIX E

### PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT CODE LIST

- I. Indirect socialization
  - a. SELF – Setting an example for adolescent by living one’s own life in a particular way with the goal of providing a model.
    - i. *When I talk to her I explain to her as a father, as a parent. That’s what I’m supposed to do. I’m not doing you any good if I don’t tell you what experiences I’ve seen and had and anything I may have done. So when you walk out the door you’re sort of armed. ~ Jim, father*
    - ii. *I dropped out of high school probably in like the 11<sup>th</sup> grade. So, that’s why I’m groundin’ in him, ‘get your education, nothing’s more important than your education.’ ‘Cause I dropped out and, I went ahead and got my GED. ~ Lynice, mother*
    - iii. *I mean, I didn’t go to school but just living right. I don’t drink and smoke and do all that. And trying to raise him right, train him right, teach him right. ~ Wanda, mother*
- II. Explicit supportive behaviors
  - a. PROG - Enrolling in academic enrichment programs such as tutoring or academic summer camps to bolster student achievement.
    - i. *They got this program for teenagers, where they talk about the arts. I’m trying to get her into that. ~ Ashleigh, mother*
  - b. HMWK - Academic support, including homework as a joint effort, assisting with research into college or future careers.
    - i. *Let him know that I am concerned and I am keeping on top of this. Don’t try to dupe me. He did that before. I found out through the teachers he was coming home telling me one thing, going back to school telling the teacher something else. That game’s old now so don’t try to play that game at me anymore. But I’m staying on top with his teachers what he has to do, assignments and different stuff like that. ~ Wanda, mother*
  - c. ACT - Encouraging supplemental academic activities not assigned by the school to increase achievement.
    - i. *Before he was going to summer school I’d make him come here [to the public library] and each day you check you some books out, bring them home, do me a book report or whatever. ~ Wanda, mother*

- ii. *And the thing we do to get her ready for [state performance tests] is, we just prep her like, you know, bring home some extra work, extra Math, extra Reading...different things that can help you out during these tests. ~ Roberta, mother*
  - d. MON - Monitoring adolescent's whereabouts, friends, and extra-curricular activities to prevent negative influences and involvement in dangerous situations
    - i. *Be here eleven o'clock, you know. When we call that cell phone, you gonna answer. ~ Renay, mother*
    - ii. MON- net - Networking with like-minded parents, valuing the combined power of community parents in collectively guiding and monitoring adolescents.
      - 1. *A lot of parents now, once I found out who their friends is, that type of thing, we're all sort of... concerned about how their child will come over here, you know, what's goin' on. ~ Jim, father*
      - 2. *If somebody reprimands Anna and she's wrong, I might get hurt that it wasn't me that reprimanded her, but I can accept the fact that somebody else is trying. ~ Shabannu, mother*
- III. Involvement at school
  - a. ADV - Parent-initiated involvement with the school, advocating for child's education or discussing concerns/issues with school personnel when contact is not school-initiated or mandatory
    - i. *I've been working with his language skills along with the teachers. I've always felt that I'm an extension of that. I need to be involved. ~ Lana, mother*
  - b. CONF - Attending parent-teacher conferences on a regular basis
    - i. *When I went to open house and to parents' conferences and stuff like that, they always let us know that they were always available for the kids after school. ~ Wanda, mother*
- IV. Aspects of parent-adolescent relationship
  - a. SUPP – Emphasizing to adolescent that parent is a source of support and available as a non-judgmental confidante/mentor should adolescent choose to take advantage of this.
    - i. *I think I was there for him spiritually, physically, mentally, and supportive, even career wise for him, even on an educational basis, so that the door is always open. ~ Lana, mother*
  - b. VAL - Instilling beliefs about the value of education for future aspirations and making responsible choices in life
    - i. *When I was in school my mother, she didn't graduate from high school or anything, but she always wanted her five kids to go on and graduate. And, you know, she never pressured us...when we got out of school. "You're gonna do this. You're gonna do that." She made it our choice and I, in turn, am making it his choice. You know, "Whatever you do I just want you to succeed and do your best." And I would like for him to have the education. You know, go beyond high school. Because I did have brothers*

*and sisters that did go to college, but I didn't go. But I would like to see him go to college, you know, and be successful at whatever he does. ~ Wanda, mother*

- c. ACAD – Making adolescent aware of parental expectations in terms of grades and/or pursuing post-secondary education
  - i. *I just stay on her about her grades and stuff, that's all I can do right now, you know just help her out and just tell her, I mean this is what I expect of you to do. ~ Madison, mother*

## APPENDIX F

### RACIAL IDENTITY CODE LIST

- I. Minimizing race/egalitarian beliefs
  - a. NON – not seeing race as an important part of self, not reflecting on impact of race as important for oneself
    - i. *I really don't think about like, being Black. I don't know. I don't really think about it that much. ~ Raina, student*
  - b. MOT – dismissing race as playing a role in success and focusing on internal characteristics (drive, motivation) as overriding race
    - i. *Whatever you wanna be, just do what you gotta do and put your mind to it. Believe in yourself. Gotta believe you can do it. ~ Raina, student*
    - ii. *I hear a lot of people complainin' about well, because you're Black, and a White person will get the job before you, but it's not really that. It's just you have to want it more. ~ Jason, student*
  - c. APP – focusing on physical appearance and self-presentation as more important than race alone for influencing one's opportunities for success
    - i. *Not really race itself, but how you carry yourself. And, African American students that I see tend to wear the baggy jeans and all that stuff. I don't personally. But, I think that if someone went to an interview like that, into a business, that they're not gonna get a job. ~ Neamkei, student*
  - d. OPT – being optimistic about opportunities available to Blacks, disagreeing with messages of cynicism/pessimism and/or racism they may hear from family members or community
    - i. *People around here be sayin' because you're Black you're not going to be successful or anything. Like the system was set up for Blacks to fail. That's not true. ~ Jason, student*
    - ii. *I used to hear all the time that all White people was the same, like all White people was racist. That's all I used to hear on the streets. Like nowadays some Black people, that I would say was racist, would sit there and say, 'Oh, White people was this, or White people was that', But I disagree strongly with what they say. ~ Becky, student*
- II. Awareness of race-related obstacles (past & present)
  - a. AWARE – awareness of racism as still existing and potentially impacting one's opportunities (e.g., jobs)



- i. *I think they treat Blacks differently. Or if you ain't White. Lots of ways, nowadays. <on her preference for attending an HBCU> That's probably one of the reasons why I wouldn't want to go to a White school. ~ Meshelle, student*
  - ii. AWARE-s: awareness particular to pre-conceived notions of teachers, institutionalized racism in school (1 above mean, 1 below mean).
    - 1. *Sometimes there [are race-based differences in chances of school success], not all the time. ~ Leroy, student*
  - iii. AWARE-p: racism in how authority treats Black people, racial profiling
    - 1. *You just see [racism] a lot around here. 'Cause we have White cops. They treat Black people worse. ~ Meshelle, student*
  - iv. AWARE-emo: emotional reaction to realization that racism is still prevalent, or after hearing past accounts of racism
    - 1. *When [my grandfather] was tellin' me [about Black history] I was kind of feelin' hatred toward another race. But then, I thought to myself, like everything happens for a reason. ~ Jason, student*
- b. HIST – recognizing historical impact of racism (does not include current awareness of racism)
  - i. *My grandma was just tellin' me how it was when she was growin' up. 'Cause she grew up in the South when Martin Luther King came up...she just say how it was with the...gettin' sprayed and everything. I wanna cry. Because I think it's sad. ~ Keisha, student*
- c. HIER – acknowledging the social position of Blacks and effects on people's pre-conceived notions
  - i. *[Discussing president-elect Obama] How like, his skin color, and how people said that it's not right for him to be...Black. Or whatever. In the white house, they say they would like to keep the white house...White. ~Becky, student*
- d. CONS – conscious of how others perceive one due to race.
  - i. *<on how race plays a role for him> Like when people...like if you go to a certain place, how people look at you. ~ John, student*
  - ii. *If I went to an all White school, I feel like...I feel like I stand out. ~ Meshelle, student*

### III. Racial pride

- a. ID – seeing race as an important part of self
  - i. *I just think I would [want to attend an HBCU] because I've been around Black people all my life. I guess I like to be around my kind. ~ Meshelle, student*
  - ii. ID-PRIDE – gaining a sense of pride from one's racial identification.
    - 1. *Knowing what the Blacks went through. And knowing that I'm part of that race. I feel pride. ~ Leroy, student*

- b. ROLE – seeing self as potential future role model for Black children, serving as a positive image
  - i. *Because I can do positive things for Black people. Instead of like being on the streets and stuff. I can do a positive thing. ~ Tim, student*

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